

## Repercussions of Self-censorship in Storytelling: A Study of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh*

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### Abstract

Storytelling is a form of communication for authors to express their ingenuity and engage a wider audience with pertinent social concerns. Censorship, on the other hand, is frequently enforced by state legislation to preserve societal harmony, and writers frequently face censorship issues from various authoritative groups or organisations. Writers confronted with censorship concerns have an internal 'censor' to prevent them from breaking religious and governmental laws. As a result, the author blurs the lines within the texts and draws parallels between self-censorship and free expression. While censorship concerns are readily apparent in the world of literature, the covert conflict of self-censorship remains unacknowledged. The impact of self-censorship on writers' creativity and narrative process warrants further investigation. The study attempts to examine the challenges faced by the novelist Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar and the instances of self-censorship in the novel *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018), which was written immediately following the censorship issues in *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015). Shekhar's contributions to Indian literature are noteworthy. His book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) has been contested because of the alleged negative portrayal of Santhal tribal women. Despite facing criticism, allegations, and censorship challenges, the author persevered and successfully published the novel *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018).

**Keywords:** Dissent Writing; Censorship; Self-Censorship; Constraints of Conformity; Social Media Vilification

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## Introduction

Throughout history, storytelling has served as a potent method of communication, facilitating the acquisition of knowledge about different generations and cultures worldwide. Storytelling has been crucial for the survival and development of civilisations throughout human history. Furthermore, it has been argued that storytelling has the potential to foster creativity among individuals (Launikari, 2015). Dissident authors utilise storytelling as a means of communication to effectively convey their thoughts and actively involve larger audiences in the exploration and resolution of societal challenges. Throughout history, writers who have voiced their dissent have encountered many forms of censorship, ranging from the burning of books to the ban of their publication. As exemplified by Markus Zusak's novel *The Book Thief* (2007), the Nazi regime engaged in the act of burning books. During the Soviet era, writers from Russia experienced censorship, resulting in the ban of their publications. Examples of such works are *We* (1924) by Yevgeny Zamyatin, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (1967). *The Noodle Maker* (2004) by Chinese dissident Ma Jian is banned in China. Similarly, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1989) was banned during the contemporary era. Prominent Indian authors, including Arundhati Roy, Perumal Murugan, and S Hareesh, encountered censorship challenges because of their dissident literary works. Danilo Kis argues that "[t]he fight against censorship is open and dangerous, therefore heroic, while the battle against self-censorship is anonymous, lonely and unwitnessed, and it makes its subject feel humiliated" (Kis, 1986: 43). Therefore, whether deliberately or inadvertently, writers who have encountered literary censorship exhibit an inherent inclination towards self-censorship.

Self-censorship is a voluntary action; however, it is undertaken out of fear or repression (Day, 2021). An individual's creativity in the literary world is stifled by the act of self-censoring their

freedom of expression. It is significant to understand the impact of self-censorship in the contemporary era. After facing censorship, the authors carry out censor as a "co-author". As a result, the writers are obligated to exclude some themes to adhere to social norms and avoid controversies. The writers' freedom of speech and integrity are compromised as they engage in self-censorship of their thoughts and dissenting perspectives. The study focuses on the repercussions of self-censorship in the writings of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018). Shekhar is a renowned writer and government doctor in Jharkhand. His works are known for representing the hardship of the Santhal tribal people. *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014), his debut novel, was awarded the 2015 Yuva Puraskar. The second work, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), is an anthology that was included in the Hindu Literary Prize Shortlist for 2016. People protested against the novel as it shows Santhal women in a bad light, and Shekar had faced the charges of obscenity. The book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), was banned by the Jharkhand government in August 2017 due to its unfavourable portrayal of Santhal women. Subsequently, the prohibition was rescinded in December 2017. The extremists continued to harass Shekar on social media persistently. This study emphasises the necessity to investigate the negative impacts of digital media harassment and the ban that shook the author.

So, this study is an attempt to examine Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's experience with censorship and the consequences of self-censorship on his writings. The introduction offers a comprehensive outline of the importance of dissident authors' narratives and the obstacles that they encounter. Moreover, it explores the lost battles of dissident authors with self-censorship. The literature review encompasses the existing research on Shekhar's writing, as well as the influence of self-censorship in disciplines like journalism and translation. The research approach employs the

concept of self-censorship to ascertain the underlying truth, which is effectively expressed through the mystical character in the text chosen for the study. The investigation examines the vilification of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar on social media, which led to self-censorship as reflected in the novel *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018). The research findings indicate that Shekhar experienced a transient period of self-censorship but did not continue to engage in self-censorship. Nevertheless, he resuscitated and wrote the semi-autobiographical novel, *My Father's Garden* (2018). The study highlights Shekhar's successful triumph over his self-censorship, which is a source of inspiration and encouragement for writers who have faced comparable challenges of censorship and harassment on social media.

### Literature Review

The research centres on the concept of self-censorship as depicted in the writings of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar. The novel *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015) sparked controversy and subsequently faced censorship. Additionally, the study examines the research concerning Shekhar's work and explores how social media vilification results in self-censorship. The following is a review of the existing research on self-censorship in diverse disciplines, such as journalism and translation. This study identifies the dearth of research on the repercussions of self-censorship as revealed through the literature review.

Writers employ the form of storytelling to convey their diverse points of view and explore prevailing societal, political, and religious patterns. Throughout history, these narratives have faced restrictions and bans, while contemporary writers continue to endure instances of social media-based violence in response to their literary works. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar faced criticism and threats on social media after the publication of *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015). This book is a collection of ten short stories centred around the Adivasi, Santhal community in Jharkhand. The novel provides a noteworthy depiction of

the Santhal culture and way of life and is an example of an artistic endeavour that accurately portrays the current state of affairs. The novel's narratives portray the experiences of Santhals, who consistently strive to maintain their dignity amidst corporate hegemony. The novel's issues and depiction of brutality and cruelty are undeniably pertinent in contemporary times, as the state ideology can present a significant threat to the democratic and diverse structure of Indian society. In summary, these unique narratives aim to raise societal awareness regarding various concerns, specifically focusing on those impacting the Santhal community (Tripathi, 2017: 193-196). A majority of the narratives within the text featured female protagonists. A limited number of these female characters exhibit audacity and resistance, while the majority are encumbered by the inequities imposed upon them by a system that subjugates them. Furthermore, the study by Koduri and Raju examines the depiction of women's status in patriarchal civilisations, the clash between modernisation and traditionalism, and the detrimental impact of sex labour and mining on society. Shekhar garnered substantial literary attention and received negative criticism for his book, particularly from community members. His work, primarily focused on depicting Santhal women, was deemed upsetting and uncouth (Koduri & Raju, 2022).

In a similar vein, S. Hareesh, a Malayalam author, faced harassment on social media for misrepresenting a statement regarding women who visit temples, which was deemed contentious. Mathrubhumi, the publisher, retracted the book following the distressing online harassment directed towards Hareesh and his family. The demonstrators lodged an official complaint for a ban in the Supreme Court, which was ultimately rejected. Hareesh said he "was too weak" to handle the abuse he faced on social media (Hareesh, 2020; The Print Team, 2018). The study, "Impact of ICT on Literary Censorship: A Study of Selected Controversial Texts in Contemporary India" (2022) illustrates Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's encountered hostility in both online and offline domains resulting in the ban of his book and

subsequent suspension from his employment. The act of Adivasis burning his effigy and books demonstrates how specific segments of society are motivated to engage in social media campaigns against the author (Kader & Gundala, 2022). There are ongoing arguments around censorship, and writers are actively combating these challenges by upholding their integrity. However, the struggle against self-censorship remains unacknowledged.

According to C S Lakshmi, a Tamil writer, women writers encounter difficulties when it comes to publishing their works, particularly when they are subjected to censorship by male editors. Women writers are compelled by editors to limit their exploration of specific subjects, such as domestic issues, resulting in a hindered representation of their voices in literature (Women writers do face discrimination, 2001). Literature requires freedom for unfettered expression. Censorship often prevents the emerging diverse range of literary texts. Censorship and literature have a long history together, with several fights and arguments. There is a vast list of authors who have suffered for their creations. The totalitarian government imposes censorship rules on writers who express opposing views and forces writers and dissidents to publish in accordance with the approval of the regime. To avoid controversies and struggle writers go into hiding, publish their work secretly (Samizdat) or even self-censor their works (Nordby, 2015). Self-censorship is a deliberate withholding of information from others. This hinders the productivity of a democratic society by impeding the freedom of expression and limiting information flow. The diverse viewpoint conceals knowledge that could shed new light on societal concerns, which is crucial to society as a whole (Bar-Tal, 2017).

In certain instances, fear is the primary stimulant behind self-censorship. Dissidents, journalists, and those who attempt to voice their thoughts face threats. Prior limitations and the constraints of conformity are examples of how censoring can become ingrained in an individual's mindset. Self-censorship emerges from a natural impulse for conformity to social

expectations. The role of the censor becomes easier when writers often choose not to use their freedom of speech (Sturges, 2008). Self-censorship occurs on many levels, including literary translation. Translators were forced to modify suitable passages in order to publish their work (Somlo, 2014). Those who self-censor typically have comparatively higher levels of anxiety when communicating and interacting with others, as well as more significant concern over their perceived worth by others. They typically have weaker self-esteem and engage in less argumentation (Hayes et al., 2005). Self-censorship is primarily driven by the fear of deviating from societal norms, as characterised by the International Press Institute as a "constraint of conformity" (Windrich, 2001: 2188). When a writer composes their work, they may experience uncertainty regarding the acceptability of their work by the readers. The question at hand is whether this writing meets socio-cultural standards and expectations or if it has received approval from editors and publishers.

Scholars argue that "the control of what one says or does to avoid annoying or offending others but without being told officially" (Clark & Grech, 2017:11) stems from the desire to persuade society and readers. A recent study examines the growing trend of self-censorship on contemporary online platforms within the context of the current social media ecosystem. This study examines the factors that contribute to self-censorship among Russian journalists, including personal, external, and editorial factors. The researchers surveyed 95 journalists from different regions of Russia, in addition to conducting seven interviews. The survey indicates that although the political threat is an external factor, individuals engage in self-censorship and self-limitation due to personal motivations (Bodrunova et al, 2020).

On the contrary, a survey that included 526 literary writers elicited their opinions regarding physical violence, hate speech, and social media vilification. Furthermore, every second individual has already been the victim of violence and is aware of attacks on their fellow

writers. Concerned about the state of free speech in Germany, they also reported increased threats, intimidation, and abusive responses. As a result, writers undergo abuse and attack, which causes them to be more cautious when writing and stimulates a propensity to self-censor (Wegner et al., 2020: 145-157).

The controversies surrounding the novel *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015), and the censorship challenges encountered by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar are analysed in the literature review section. Additionally, it examines the social media criticism directed at Shekhar and other writers, as opposed to the indications of self-censorship discovered in their works after the censorship, controversies, and harassment on social media. Extensive research has been conducted to examine the global ramifications of self-censorship in the fields of journalism and literary translation. The research highlights the necessity for additional inquiries regarding the ensuing conflict with self-censorship that Indian dissident writer Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar endured. The selection of the novel *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018) is predicated on the fact that it was written shortly after the author encountered censorship-related challenges. The author's experience with censorship is conspicuous and widely discussed, whereas the main focus of the study is to uncover hidden indicators of self-censorship in his subsequent works after his struggle against censorship challenges. This research aims to offer an analysis of the elements and consequences of self-censorship induced by defamatory remarks on social media within Shekhar's account.

### Methodology

The study employs the notion of self-censorship in the story *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018). Self-censorship is a medium that can impede the functioning of a democratic society. It involves deliberately hiding information from others without any statutory restrictions. Writers are compelled to engage in self-censorship, when artistic freedom is at risk, due to censorship. Furthermore, this psychological barrier not only

limits access to knowledge but also obstructs freedom of expression and hinders the unrestricted dissemination of information (Bar-Tal, 2017; Sturges, 2008 ). The unhindered expression of several points of view is indispensable in a democratic society. The constraints of conformity are one of the main effects of self-censorship. The study aims to ascertain the underlying reality subtly conveyed through the characters. The mystical character, Jwala Kumar, a dragon, functions as a rhetorical device that mirrors the writer's standpoint. This study delves into the adverse effects of self-censorship and social media vilification on author Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar. However, the author endeavours to balance voicing his viewpoints and adhering to societal norms.

### Social Media Vilification

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015) is a compilation of short stories depicting Santhals' lives in Jharkhand. The book examines Santhals' socio-cultural, economic, and political endurance in their everyday life. In the third short story of this book titled *November is a Month of Migrations*, a young Santhal girl named Talamai is shown as struggling with extreme forms of terrible poverty. This research indicates that families in the tribal community endure absolute poverty, which encompasses deprivation of housing, employment, education, and sustenance. The Below Poverty Line (BPL) in India is established based on clothing, accommodation, education, healthcare, and the level of nutrition in an individual's diet. In order to effectively tackle the distinct challenges faced by tribal communities, it is imperative to acquire a comprehensive understanding of their economic circumstances, food scarcity, and cultural milieu (Patel, 2009: 4).

Similarly, the family portrayed in the book *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015) intended to move to an area where they could find employment. In one instance, a male constable who is non-tribal takes advantage of the Talamai for sex in exchange for "two pieces of cold bread pakora and a fifty-rupee note" (Shekhar, 2015: 42). The non-tribal policeman commented to Talamai "Saali, you Santhal women are made for this

only. You are good!" (Shekhar, 2015: 41). Due to her absolute poverty, the tribal woman was compelled to do anything to obtain sustenance. As a result, it has been characterised as terrible poverty surpassing the threshold of 'absolute poverty' as defined by the government under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) criteria. Thus, the portrayal of sexual encounters for just two slices of bread and the assertion that Santhal women were only appreciated for their bodily needs provoked controversy among extremists.

In August 2017, the Jharkhand government banned the book on the grounds that it portrayed Santhal women negatively. Shekhar had to face charges of obscenity and social media vilification. Later, the ban on *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015) was lifted in December 2017. Even after the ban was lifted, Shekhar faced social media violence, and the protagonist depicts his novel as pornographic:

Writer Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar has been attacked on Facebook over a period of time, with accusations that his work is "pornographic", and that it makes use of Adivasis, in "English language writing", for the writer's gain. Shekar's "critics" have set up a Facebook page called Pornocopeia to defame him as a writer of pornography, and posted pictures of others in the writing community as "friends of a pornographer". In addition to this defamation, and the loss of privacy of the writer and his friends, the critics who have been trolling Shekar have taken their persecution of the writer to the next level (The Wire Staff, 2017).

Shekhar was repeatedly vilified on social media, and protesters burned his effigies as well as the book. Due to this, he was traumatised, and the damage has lasted even after years. In an interview, he stated that digital media abuse affected him more than the ban.

I will be honest. Yes, the ban shook me. More than the ban, those attacks on the social media shook me and scared me. Also, I was suspended from my job, not for embezzling funds or neglecting my duty, but for writing a book, and that suspension made me feel terribly indignant and helpless (Meghani, 2019).

Shekhar strongly depicted the Adivasi community's socioeconomic condition, lack of health care, and denial of education. He was particularly outraged by how corporates exploited the wealth of their land. The government forced them to dance and sing in front of corporate executives in order to exhibit them as the pride of the country's indigenous people. However, protests against Shekhar were started by specific community members through social media.

In the age of digital culture, disseminating hatred and false information about writers traumatises them and shuts off their creativity. This fosters writers to write to meet the standards and expectations of readers as well as those of society. In recent decades, there has been a significant prevalence of the ban, censorship, and suppression of writers' literary works, driven mainly by socio-cultural, political, religious, and obscene considerations. However, the dissenting opinions of writers are suppressed due to the hostility they face on social media, which results in self-censorship. As already discussed above, the social media defamation has affected prominent Indian writers such as Perumal Murugan, S. Hareesh, Salman Rushdie, and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar. In response to the accusation of 'hurting sentiments', Perumal Murugan admitted that he experienced a sense of internal censorship.

[C]ensor is seated inside me now. He is testing every word that is born within me. His constant caution that a word may be misunderstood so, or it may be interpreted thus, is a real bother. But I'm unable to shake him off (Murugan, 2017: 213).

In a similar vein, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar also faced instances of internet slander. Research indicates that Shekhar's literary trajectory abruptly shifted toward children's literature due to social media harassment and censorship issues.

## Self-Censorship in Response to Social Media Harassment

*Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018) narrates the tale of the Mohan Chandar family and their encounter with a dragon. Mohan Chandar, his spouse Rupa Devi, and their three children—Naren, Biren, and Namita—reside in a Madhya Pradesh village. The novel is set in the postcolonial era. This book portrays a completely abandoned and secluded village lacking any necessary government amenities.

Since Champakbagh was a small village, it wasn't connected to an electricity line. There was not even a proper road to connect Champakbagh to other villages and towns. The only road that passed by Champakbagh was unpaved and full of potholes (Shekhar, 2018: 45).

The above statement emphasises the unemployment and poverty experienced by the Adivasi population of Champakbagh when examining the economic conditions of its residents. A significant proportion of the male population within the community depended on their daily earnings to sustain their households, with limited land ownership and a small number of livestock. Meanwhile, Mohan Chandar and his family discovered a dragon, on a rainy day, that appeared to have been abandoned by its clan. The dragon was covered with rainwater. Mohan tries to help the creature out of sympathy. Even though Rupa Devi was hesitant to help it due to its peculiar appearance, they ended up rescuing it. The creature then became slightly conscious and opened its eyes, breath the fire from its mouth for lighting the *Chulha* (stove). The family was taken aback by this and decided not to tell anyone about it in the village for fear that it would cause problems for both the family and the creature. They even offered the poor animal some rice, which it happily accepted as food, and over time, it became a family member. The children named the creature 'Jwala Kumar' because it emitted fire from its mouth. Jwala resembles a chameleon, flies like a bat, and has a snake-like body. The community members may perceive it as dangerous and harbour concerns

that it could endanger their lives. Mohan and his family did not allow Jwala to fly outside during the day, but he flew in the night.

A cyclone hit Champakbagh before December of that year, and people suffered, including Mohan's family. Children in the village were unable to reach school and missed their midday meal. Mohan Chandar knew that missing a day would put him in financial trouble, so he went to work even in the downpour and reached home drenched. The entire village suffered over the month of December, which included an unexpected cyclone and rain that lasted more than a week. The villagers and Mohan's family survived with the government-run ration shop's limited rice supply. Due to the continuous rainfall, the people have run out of firewood and kerosene, resulting in a catastrophic situation. The village's inhabitants depend on kerosene lanterns due to the absence of suitable road infrastructure and electrical power. In the past, the staff members of the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) provided solar-powered lighting; however, they ceased doing so after their initial visit. The family encountered insufficient sunlight due to continuous nighttime and daytime rain. "In the little sunlight they got, the family charged their solar-powered lamps. But they didn't know how long their lamps would work with the meagre power left in the batteries" (Shekhar, 2018:12). As a consequence, the villagers encountered challenges that vary seasonally over the entire year.

Summer, rains and winter— all three seasons took their toll on Champakbagh. If summers led to wells running dry, the rains damaged the only road in the village. Winters were harsh, and old people in the village often died due to the cold. Children fell ill, too. (Shekhar, 2018: 46)

The residents of Champakbagh face the most formidable obstacle in their quest for survival. In December, the people of Champakbagh depend on winter clothing that features perforations, as stated by Shekhar: "[b]ut those were all the people of Champakbagh could" (Shekhar, 2018:

90). The Mohan Chandar family, like other families in the hamlet, relied on the ration supplies provided to them as a subsidy at the government store. Furthermore, Naren, Biren, and Namita, the three offsprings of Mohan, were frequently sent to schools not alone for academic objectives, but also to partake in their midday sustenance. This reduced the financial load on their parents in certain aspects. Due to his financial circumstances, Mohan Chandar continued to labour despite the inclement weather. Abruptly, he experienced a state of illness. "Their life was already full of struggle and suffering. Many of them couldn't even afford medicines" (Shekhar, 2018: 100). Shekhar skilfully developed the bleak reality of rural Indian communities. On the contrary, *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015) depicts the extreme destitution and socioeconomic status of tribal characters. However, the aforementioned conflict between individuals is metaphorically portrayed in the *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018). This instance serves to underscore the assertion that Shekhar is motivated by the necessity for conformity. He was forced to decide between the freedom to voice his viewpoint and the responsibility to conform to societal norms. External sociocultural factors influence the implementation of self-censorship. Langley (2020) states that writers who face limitations often utilise the reading-between-the-lines technique. Prominent Russian authors, restricted by the Stalinist regime, developed the ability to practice self-censorship and employ subtlety to convey their ideas exclusively to their readers. Similarly, Tolstoy faced censorship from both the government and the Russian church. Russian writers and poets, like Alexander Pushkin, considered the father of Russian literature, and well-known dissidents from the Soviet Union, like Solzhenitsyn, faced strict censorship that scrutinised every word they penned (Langley, 2020).

In a similar vein, Shekhar employs mystical characters as rhetorical devices to substantiate his thoughts and emotions. Jwala Kumar, a mystical character, unexpectedly emerged as a valuable addition to the Mohan Chandar family.

He provided aid to the family during the continuous rainfall by igniting Chulha with his mouth. When the government neglected to provide them with sufficient medical attention, a captivating song by Jwala was played. Surprisingly, the individual experienced a complete absence of thoughts of fever, cold, medicine, or future events: "There was no thought of fever, of cold, of medicine, of what comes tomorrow—nothing" (Shekhar, 2018:103). This state of being was brought about by Jwala Kumar's melodic composition. The Adivasi populace is deprived of the necessities that are the responsibility of the government to furnish. Furthermore, their daily necessities are sourced from supernatural entities, and the government has even forsaken them in the face of a catastrophic event. The challenges faced by the characters, despite being fictional, were indeed authentic, even in the present day; this is symbolised allegorically. In essence, the author narrates the tale of Jwala Kumar's familial connection and his role in helping the family triumph over a challenging circumstance.

Rupa Devi was able to live in peace since Jwala had lit a fire in her *chulha*. She was concerned about their neighbours, who complained to her about their predicaments. Jwala is aware of the crisis affecting the entire village and Rupa Devi's hesitation in approaching him directly for help. Jwala suddenly took on the duty of saving the people, flying from Mohan's house and lighting *chulhas* in each of their homes, even less than a moment after he took off from the residence, making it impossible for anyone to identify him. With a thunderclap, Jwala departed from them and merged with its clan.

This study examines the implicit significance conveyed by author Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar. Although classified as a work of children's literature, this literary work effectively portrays the socioeconomic challenges faced by the Adivasi community. They were living in abject poverty and did not prioritise their education until the school started serving noon meals. They cannot possibly miss a single day of work, which puts them in a precarious financial situation. Due to the absence of adequate



transportation— infrastructures like railways, roads, and electricity, the government has neglected its responsibilities towards the people, and those who are part of the dominant society are also unaware of their social and economic status. A comprehensive understanding of the issue and the author's implicit expression of societal anger can solely be gained by close reading. The study, however, unveiled the predicament faced by the isolated community residents as the narrative's central theme. Furthermore, this study investigates the factors contributing to the author's constrained consideration of the Adivasi's predicament in comparison to his novel, *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015). The author explores the practices, values, and indigeneity of the tribal community. Shekhar employed Santhal language terminology in *The Adivasi will not Dance* (2015), but in *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018), did not overtly refer to the identity of the Santhal language. Censorship concerns and controversies compelled the author to achieve a state of conformity. Hayes et al. (2005: 300) propose that "[c]onformity is a form of self-censorship". Authors who have encountered censorship often suppress their ideas to maintain social cohesion. Perumal Murugan, a Tamil writer, encountered censorship obstacles and proclaimed his artistic demise on Facebook in January 2015 as "*Writer Perumal Murugan is dead*" (Kannabiran, 2015: 77). Following the lifting of the ban, Murugan released a poetry collection titled *Songs of a Coward: Poems of Exile* (2017), in which he expressed that he currently possesses a censorship board within himself. Shekhar self-censored his writing by consciously choosing to withhold information. Shekhar stated that stories were an integral part of his childhood: "I have grown up on stories my family told me — stories about kings and gods and ghosts. My father used to make up a new story every day because I had to have a new story every day" (Shekhar, 2017). The author employed the children's literature genre to subtly express his viewpoints. The Novelists effectively communicate opinions to readers using various literary strategies such as tone,

character development, allegory, and rhetorical devices. The utilisation of anthropomorphism serves as a potent technique for portraying the unpleasant truth. Authors restrict certain phrases and concepts to maintain a harmonious balance between one's personal and societal spheres. Nevertheless, when individuals express their opinions or advocate for the betterment of society and challenge the dominant societal standards, they encounter suppression. Self-censorship significantly alters a crucial element of the novel's tone inside Shekhar's narrative trajectory. Shekhar employed a mystical figure that reflected his feelings to carefully convey the reality. This may be attributed to the imposition of the ban and digital media threats, and a contentious situation has arisen around the portrayal of Adivasi female characters.

The study identifies multiple instances throughout the novel that indirectly imply the character's Adivasi identity based on their distinctive attributes. The culinary tradition of the Mohan Chandar family identifies them as Adivasis. For example, "Biren loved eating roasted rat meat" (Shekhar, 2018: 46). The practice of consuming rats is firmly ingrained in the cultural practices of the majority of Adivasis. Consequently, the prevailing caste system segregated tribal individuals according to their gastronomic inclinations. As an illustration, a particular group in Uttar Pradesh is referred to as Musahari, a term that translates to 'rat eaters'. Rats are associated with filth and illness; therefore, most Indians will find the idea of consuming them abhorrent. Nevertheless, individuals from disadvantaged communities who are employed as agricultural labourers persist in hunting and consuming rats as a means of sustenance. The Adivasi people have faced additional pressure due to the stigmatisation of this rat-eating delicacy, which has been perpetuated by culinary clichés (Saundarya, 2023: 104). Shekhar discusses the tribal community's heritage songs. Moreover, the folklore of the indigenous populations of India is extraordinarily renowned and gained significant recognition.

The people of Champakbagh, had their folk songs— songs that had been sung down generation. Some songs were sung by men, some by women. They sang those during festivals or during happy occasions, like weddings (Shekhar, 2018: 102).

These incidents and depictions show that the people from the Champakbagh belonged to the Adivasi community. According to the study, Shekhar's self-censorship is evident in to how his characters are crafted, his language, and the limited inclusion of explicit information. Significantly, a sudden shift occurred from the incorporation of direct narrative techniques into the world of children's literature. Because of the sociopsychological obstacles resulting from harassment on social media, authors conceal information to safeguard their positive social persona and avoid conflicts. The unfettered expression of ideas and the variety of viewpoints among authors are hindered by self-censorship. Suppressing creativity lowers social safety and productivity (Perlow, 2003). Shekhar continued to serve as a spokesperson for the Santhal tribal tribe. As a prolific Santhal writer, he was the first to document Santhal culture and Santhali vocabulary. The Santhal tribe is possibly associated with the Champakbagh people by their customs, way of life, beliefs, and folk songs. In the epilogue of the selected novel, Mohan Chandar's children find a nest of the dragon Jwala Kumar. And they sang a song which prevails hope,

*Jwala Kumar's story will not end  
For one day, again he will come*  
(Shekhar, 2018:120).

However, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar did not remain in the milieu of self-censorship; he revived and published the semi-autobiographical novel, *My Father's Garden* (2018). Shekhar expressed his great support for the LGBTQ+ Adivasi doctors and their struggles in *My Father's Garden* (2018).

## Conclusion

In summary, it can be inferred that writers who encounter censorship also undergo a temporary phase of self-censorship. Subsequently, they successfully achieve the dual objectives of engaging in unrestricted contemplation while conforming to societal norms. Although compelled to conform to societal conventions, the writers effectively communicate their views with greater ingenuity. The study underscores the significance of artistic freedom in the progress of humanity. The political establishment and fundamentalists target writers due to the influential nature of writing as a means of communication. Providing an unrestricted environment for authors is a collective obligation that falls upon everyone. Self-censorship might hinder the storyteller's creativity and freedom of speech. The research elucidates Shekar's triumph over his self-censorship, which continues to inspire and support writers who have encountered similar censorship issues and harassment on social media. Despite the temporal self-consciousness, their persistent writings contribute to the improvement of both the readership and society at large. Hansda Sowvender Shekhar persisted as an audacious narrator who challenged prevailing norms and advocated for marginalised tribals within his community. Despite facing criticism, social media vilification, accusations, and challenges related to censorship, he persevered as a resolute writer.

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### **Ethical Approval**

This article does not incorporate any data linked with humans or human participants. Thus, there is no need to obtain ethical approval.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### **Author Contribution Statement**

Amirthavarshini V R has conceptualised, collected resources, analysed and wrote the original draft, while Dr Bhuvaneshwari R has edited, reviewed and developed the final draft of this manuscript.

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