

# Subaltern Consciousness and Resistance to Hierarchical Hegemony in the Selected Fictions of Legendary Writer- Mahashweta Devi

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## Abstract

*Mahashweta Devi was a legend in the regional adivasi literature writings. In a true sense, she had taken the responsibilities to give the voices to the marginalized adivasi who were suppressed from the centuries. Her translated novel Chotti Munda and His Arrow was the pathbreaking novel in the field of regional translation. For the first time Birsa Munda, the legendary martyr and adivasi icon of whole Adivasi in India was known through her magnificent novel. During the colonial ruling, the adivasi territory was interrupted by the Britisher's tax policies and the oppressive treatment of the landlords. The present novel shows the realism of the adivasi struggle. Present research article tries to examine the issues of subalternity, migration, resistance and search for existential issues of the indigenous communities who stood against the internal colonization of the feudal lords in Indian society.*

**Keywords—** Internal Colonization, Resistance, Adivasi, Bhasha Literature, Postcoloniality

## I. INTRODUCTION

Britisher's have implemented their various economic policies on the forest of adivasis with the helping machinery of local landlords. The novel is the best example of the struggle of the adivasis against the oppressive moneylenders and colonizers. Adivasis were in continuous fighting with local landlords and mighty British Empire, right from the colonization of India. Hundreds of adivasi revolt took place in colonial India but hardly that revolts became the subjects of literary, social and political discourses in India. Mainstream Indian elite society and Indian English working classes never tried to introduce that warfare to the world. Mahasweta Devi wrote this novel which was the 'manifesto' of the adivasi tradition of revolts. This is the story of Munda archer Chotti, a symbol of resistance of adivasi ancestor. Regarding the theme of this novel, we remind Gayatri Spivak's statement about the subaltern study. In Mahasweta Devi's translated work *Imaginary Maps*, she blames to mainstream literary canon for its negligence towards adivasi subjugation. Pterodactyl wants to show what has been doing not the entire adivasi world on India. We did not try to know it. Each tribe is like a continent. But we never tried to know them. Never tried

to respect them. This is true of every adivasi. And we destroyed them." (Mahasweta Devi: 1995: 56).

The novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is suggestive on various accounts. Her arrows are the symbol of their society, the culture that is threatened by an outsider. It is a symbol of their ancestral faith, pride, and honor. This novel shows the continuation of the adivasi movement of land, forest and water. The leadership of Chotti, who is the evidence and observer of the suffering of decolonization from the perspective of aboriginal tribes. Her struggle was against those who came and tried to rob, their culture and erase their identity. The novel is an excellent example of double colonization of internal colonization of Adivasis in India. Adivasi wants to free themselves from colonial rule but at the sometimes they wanted to be free from internal colonization of dikus and landlords:

The August movement did not even touch the life of Chotti's community. It was as if that was the Diku's struggle for liberation. Dikus never thought of the Adivasis as an Indian. They did not draw them into the liberation struggle. In war and independence, the life Chotti and his

cohorts remained unchanged. They stand at a distance and watch it all. (Devi: 2003: 122)

### Subaltern Consciousness and Resistance to Internal Colonialism

*Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, present different shade of adivasi life. Bonded labor was the most threatening problem for the adivasis from independence. Double treachery of landlords, politicians and government is satirized by the critic G.A. Ghanshyam in his critical responses, *The Voices of the Other Post Independence Indian English Fiction*, he explores:

There was a change from all around. Some of which they saw in the form of industrialization which benefited only the dikus. There was no difference or change in the way others treated the Adivasis people or any improvement in their ways of living. They could not understand the double-dealing of the Indian administrator who gave them freedom from bonded labor on paper, yet would not let them be free. (Ghanshyam: 2013:122)

Mahasweta Devi's another comprehensive and realistic novel is *Arenyer Adhikar* (1977) shows adivasi icon Birsa Munda and his Ulgulan for the emancipation of adivasi territory as its central theme. *Ulgulan* was the simultaneous revolt in against the social, economic and political subjugation of adivasi by British power and local landlords. The novel is narrated by an ancient Munda to tell the story of the movement of adivasi revolt to the youngster adivasi Munda. Anand Mahanand has commented on Mahasweta Devi's narration power in the following words:

Mahasweta Devi exposes the subjugation of adivasi and its mental and physical effects on adivasi. She shows crookedness, exploitativeness and callousness of the British Government and the ruthless nature of non-aboriginal landlords and petty officials. She does not present a romantic or exaggerated picture of adivasi but the poverty-stricken and insecure life of adivasi people for whose rice remained an external dream. (Mahanand: 2011:170)

The character of Birsa Munda is inspiring in the novel, which arose awareness among other adivasi about the exploited machinery of the British Government. He is the commander of the revolt. To win the faith of his people, he calls himself as God, but in reality, he knows the solution of

adivasi problems is not in religious dogmas still to create enthusiasm in others he says himself 'Bhagwan'. The regional novel is rich with the literary representation of Munda Revolt, Koal Revolt, Santhal Hul, Sardari Revolt and many regional novels in Hindi were written with regional adivasi writers. Writing for adivasi rights is like a legacy, was a dignity of the regional writer but postcolonial Indian English writers, particularly Indian English novelist who neglected their adivasi past and seeks refuge in romanticization. They could not create a larger life of adivasi culture and revolts through English literature. In this regards, Anand Mahanand points out:

Unlike writers who were stimulated by adivasi exotica and choose to romanticize idealized adivasi societies, Mahashweta Devi does not present a romanticized picture of adivasi. Instead, she portrays the poverty-stricken and insecure lives of the adivasi people for whom rice remained an external dream, where life meant wandering from one village to another due to ceaseless eviction by 'dikus' for whom land reclaimed the forest was the basis of adivasi life. (Mahanand: 2011: 171)

## II. NEED TO DEFINE CULTURAL HEGEMONY IN LITERATURE

Indian English novelists have shown the adivasi as bare-footed in the novels who are the native son of the soil. Through their broad literary canvass, the mainstream has demeaned the adivasi suffering where Billy Biswas looks to adivasi life as free from all worldly activities, Bilasia the adivasi girl as goddesses, the old Dhunia as more mature adivasi chief of the village. He praises everything about adivasi life in the novel but the drought-like situation, the problem of hunger and miserable situation of adivasi comes to know us from the local adivasi chief Dhunia. Marginalization is not a new phenomenon so as it in literature. A serious comment has been made by S. N. Chaudhary in the introduction of the book *Social Movement In Adivasi India* where he opines,

"Thousands of tribes have been displaced from their native place without any proper rehabilitation. It is neither just humanistic from a adivasi point of view. Due to the absence of voice against displacement and silence on various issues, including subjugation, industrial houses prefer to install their project in adivasi areas" (Chaudhary: 2010:05).

The colonization of India has four hundred years of history, but the political, social, economic marginalization of adivasi is older than that. Thousands of Indian English novel on the theme of post-independent India, postcolonial India, Global India as depicted in the novels of Arvind Adiga, Palash Maharotra, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Shashi Tharoor have published on the middle-class life of India but several marginalization of adivasis could not become the part of their literary sensibility. It really seems strange, writer who had worldly knowledge about imperial subjugation and its crushing power over marginal cultures seems unaware about adivasi victimization, subjugation, corporate loots and hardcore marginalization. While writing colonial impact on Indian psyche, novels must take adivasi culture, subjugation and deprivation in consideration. In this regard, Virginias Xaxa, comments in *State, Society and Tribes*:

The reclamation of the forest for land cultivation, expansion of roads and railways, subjugation of minerals resources form of a key economic activity during the colonial period. Needless to say, these policies led to the large 'scale destruction of natural resources and yet the problems and hardships suffered by the adivasi were not felt acutely unit the post-independence period. Either the exact impact of the policy was not realized or the policy, despite expropriating the rights of the adivasi people gives some freeway to them. By employing such processes, thousands of square kilometers of adivasi land were brought under the forest department. (Xaxa: 2008:108)

The history of Indian English fiction which took place nearly 1860 with the prose writing of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the first English novel is to be considered is *Raj Mohan's wife*, means novel writing on Indian themes started during 1870, which was the peak period for adivasi revolts for theirs. International Adivasi *Ulgulan* of Birsa Munda started during 1890 which shook the colonial policies of British Empire. Today Native American Tribes also consider Birsa Munda as an icon for adivasi dignity. Birsa Munda is in the heart of Native American but while writing colonial history, a massive part of adivasis freedom fight against from internal colonialism and British colonialism was totally excluded by the historians as well as from the literary platform of Indian English writers. About the historical background of adivasi which could be the most inspiring episode of writing for all Indian, Gladson

Dungdung, in his celebrated volume *Whose Country Is This Anyway*, foregrounds:

In Ancient times, the Adivasis had ownership rights on natural resources and they judicially used these resources for their survival. Consequently, the Adivasis were living with autonomy, peace and prosperity. The situation change after the Aryan invasion and became worse during the British Rul. On one hand, the Aryans destroyed the Adivasi civilization, denied their indigenous identity and did not accept them as fellow human beings and on the other the British imposed violence on the Adivasis by grabbing their land, territory and resources and even named few of them as criminal tribes. (Dungdung: 2013:16)

Literature is the manifestation of one's emotions. It gives expression to pathos, sensibilities and subjugation of suppressed marginal who are broken, discontented from their culture. Indian English novelist like Kamala Markandeya, Ruth P. Jabhawala, Shashi Deshpande, Chaman Nahal and Arun Joshi brought the themes like sense of alienation, monotonous urbanity, broken village culture, exploited feminism and degenerated identities in their senses of historical revival of Indian English writing but social exclusion, subjugation, colonial suppression, poverty and deprivation of adivasi could not take place in their novel writing. It seems because of the writer's eliteness and westernizes outlook towards the social culture of India, they could not depict the adivasi culture of this land. Regarding the fragmented identities of adivasi, M. Hamid Ansari comments in his *Marginalization of Adivasi in India*, edited book *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion opines*:

Across the nation, gigantic industrial, power, irrigation and mining projects representing the current development paradigm have caused Adivasi protest against land acquisition and displacement. Aligning our development needs with Adivasi rights and enhancing their FDI is the need of the hour. This is also essential to prevent the violent manifestation of discontent and unrest in our adivasi areas emanating from exclusion and alienation. (Xaxa: 2012:22)

### III. CONCLUSION

The identity of Adivasi in India is assuming merely as “Huge Labor Industry”. Literature should be the voice to the marginal exploited section but in case of adivasis in India, mainstream seldom speaks about them in literature. Characters in Indian English literature like Augustya, Billy, Clinton Helen, Maharaja Hiroji, Abhayraj, Nitin Bose and many others are all elite and belongs to well to do families. They represent the upper strata of city life and daily humdrum of city life but the adivasi character leaves in darkness. Rima’s husband, a adivasi man is a porter on a railway station, seems only one line identity in the novel, but the writer could raise this point of bonded labor or labor industry hub of adivasi across India. But the main characters in the novel seek refuge in hedonism, aestheticism and body celebration of adivasi women. Bonded labor is the most spreading problem of adivasi but remains absence in India English literature. Regarding these labor industry of adivasi, Christian Strumpwell in his *The Making and Unmaking of an Adivasi Working Class in Western Orissa*, speaks in the edited book, *Savage Attack*, opines:

By then the construction of plants, mills and townships was already in full swing. The first major work was to proper the ground, cut trees, blast rocks, dig, excavation, erect power poles and rail tracks. This was done by a large army of the laborer who did not require any industrial skill. These laborers were Adivasis from the Sundergarh itself. Within a year, the ground was prepared and the initial workforce of largely Adivasi and Oriya unskilled daily waged laborers was reduced from approximately 46000 to 300000. (Sterling: 1963:23)

Mahashweta Devi’s writing is an excellent example of speaking truth to power when administrative policies are responsible to ruin the marginal and subaltern communities. Her writing is an acute example for all those new aspirants of literary writings who thinks that displacement, disparity and disillusionments of the broken communities should be the core issues of literary or creative writings. Therefore new writers and researcher can enter into tribal world of Mahashweta Devi to give roaring voice to unexplored resistance of tribal against all kind of tyranny and double dispassion of downtrodden communities against internal as well as western colonization and super hegemony.

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