



The Voice of Unheard in the Mahasweta Devi's Works: A Study on Tribes of India

Sudheerkumar Banoth

Ph.D. Scholar in English Literature
Kakatiya University, Warangal
Telangana, India

Keywords: Adivasis, folklore, ballad, myth, legends, poignant, crucified, plight, lynching, oeuvre.

Introduction

Mahasweta Devi (1926 – 2016), born in a middle class Bengali family in Dhaka to literary parents, migrated to India after partition. First as a humanist and next as a writer, Devi left an indelible impression on the minds of the people and chose to work on the most deprived communities in India. She emerged as one of the greatest contemporary Indian writers by becoming a voice of the tribals in India. She played the role of both an activist and a writer. She was successful in juxtaposing creativity and reality in her writings. Most of her writings were based on the factual information gathered by her by touring the tribal areas where no writer would have ever ventured to go. Her oeuvre includes many short stories, novels most of which reflected the despondent life, depressed living conditions, the customs and habits of the Indian tribes. Yet, her novels were never without novelty as she carved a niche for her narrative style.

Mahasweta Devi as a woman of a great spirit worked day and night for the upliftment of millions of Adivasis spread across Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Telagana and in many parts of the country being one with them. She listened to their stories personally and transformed them into varied forms of writing such treatises, stories, novels etc. She ambidextrously managed writing and activism and spread the message of commitment by involving scores of activists, intellectuals, writers and people with sensitivity and commitment. She raised her voice through her writings. Her voice and the voice of the tribals became inseparable.

Mahasweta Devi says that the measures taken by the authorities for the removal of poverty among tribals were so inadequate that the money flowed for the purpose never once reached them. She questions if only the tribals had received any benefits, why could have they gone. She also finds fault with the irresponsible behavior of the urbanites as there was hardly any concern for the tribals dwelling in the far off lands. There was no love showered upon the tribals and for centuries together, they were ignored. She says we are at the last gasp of the century, yet we haven't learnt to respect the tribals. Even today, they live as if their world is different from ours. If we had had any real exchange with them, it could have enriched us.

Mahasweta Devi as an activist could go to any extent in order to bring justice to the infinite sufferings of the tribals. In January 2006, she along with G. N. Devy, Uday Narain Singh of Mysore, went to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and appealed him to do something concrete for the de-notified tribes of India. It was in response to that a special commission was formed under Bal Krishna Renke of Maharashtra. Renke came out with suggestions for the remedial steps to be taken for the improvement of the lives of the de-notified tribes.

Mahasweta Devi raised her voice for the tribals, pitied them for their plights. She felt that these innocent tribals were made targets, treated as criminals and what not. Pitiably, they were labeled as 'born criminals' and were subject to beatings, lynching etc. Often they were made to evacuate the places where they were living. It was so unfortunate that without any evidence for their crimes, they were framed in crimes. As an extension to that the British under their colonial rule passed an abominable Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 and crucified the tribals. This act further worsened the situation and made the life of tribals more miserable.

Mahasweta Devi was moved at the plight of the tribals because of the laxity of the officials and wished to stand by them through activism on one side and poignant writing on the other reflecting the lives of the people in them. Her concern, care and love for the tribals made her to research explicatively on their lives and write stories herself being the voice of tribals. Each of her novella or short story reflected one incident or the other that in reality troubled them.

The concluding remarks seen in a critical way by reviewing all the five novels taken up for study. It also covers the findings of the study in a detailed way as to why the voice of the tribals is subjugated and brings forth the truth behind the real suppression of tribals, the motive behind the exploitation of tribals and identifies the fact of the involvement of the rich people in every context.

Mahasweta Devi as an activist and a writer dedicated her entire life for the most important cause of tribals and fought relentlessly against the exploitation of the tribals, herself being the voice for them.

References:

Devi, Mahasweta. *Agni Garbha*, New Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1979. Print.

---. *Aklaant Kaurav*. New Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1979. Print.

---. *Rakasi Kora*. New Delhi: HBT, 1982. Print.

---. *Gram Bangla*. New Delhi: Radha Krishan Prakashan, 1985. Print.

---. *Shrestho Golpo*. Calcutta: Promo, 1985. Print.

---. *Bashai Tudu*. Kolkata: Thema, 1990. Print.

---. *Imaginary Maps*. Kolkata: Thema, 1993. Print.

---. *Five Plays*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997. Print.

---. *Outcast*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002. Print.

---. *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002. Print.

---. *Bitter Soil*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002. Print.

---. *Bait: Four Stories*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2004. Print.

---. *After Kurukshetra*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2005. Print.

---. *Introduction to Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2002. Print.

---. *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006. Print.

---. *The Book of the Hunter*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009. Print.

---. *Dust on the Road*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010. Print.

---. *Rudali*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997. Print.

---. *The Queen of Jhansi*. Calcutta : Seagull Books, 2000. Print.

---. *Titu Mir*. Calcutta :Seagull Books, 2000. Print.

---. *Chhoti Munda and His Arrow*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002. Print.

---. *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2003. Print.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Picador, 1988. Print.

Albernethy, George L. and Thomas A. Langford. *History of Philosophy*. California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc. 1967. Print.

- Bai, Kallemeera. *Women's Voices: The Novels of Indian Women Writers*. New Delhi: Prestige, 1996. Print.
- Bandyopadhyay, Shekhar. *Culture and Hegemony: Social Domination in Colonial Bengal*. New Delhi: Sage, 2004. Print.
- Chatterjee, Sudipto. *Interview with the Author*. New York: Asia, 1997. Print.
- Damodaram, Vinita and Richard H. (ed.). *Nature and the Orient*. New Delhi: Oxford India, 2000. Print.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London: Methuen, 1948. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin, 1990. Print.
- George, K. M. (ed.). *Modern Indian Literature. An Anthology in Three Vols*. Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 1993. Print.
- Naik, M. K. and S. Mokashi, Puneekar. (ed.). *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English*. Madras: OUP, 1977. Print.

