

# Mahasweta Devi's Literary Work: Medium of Tribal Consciousness

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## ABSTRACT

Present paper shed light on tribal people's consciousness in literary, social, political, and cultural sphere of life in the context of Mahasweta Devi's literary oeuvre. Tribal people are still marginalized in the society. They are victimized by the various social evils which is still prevalent in Indian society. Various government policies are responsible for the detraction of tribal culture. In these circumstances Mahasweta Devi's literary works play significant role in the upliftment of the tribal's cultural heritage. Her work rejuvenated the spirit of tribal people. She awakens the tribal people about their social as well as cultural heritage. Her works are the key source of inspiration to the many literalists in tribal literature. Her works play crucial role in inculcating the feministic approach among tribal women.

## 1. Introduction

Mahasweta Devi was an essayist, short story writer, editor, playwright, columnist and a revolutionary who endlessly strove hard to inculcate the principle of revolution and struggled for the betterment of the tribals, dalits and marginalized people. She dedicated her entire life for the welfare of tribals. Her works are the reflection of tribal people's culture, their history and identity. Her insight for the tribal people paved the way for hatred towards the marginalization and exploitation of these people. She was very much aware about the atrocities committed on the tribals and it compelled her to become a committed activist. She gave voice to the tyrannized and downtrodden people through her entire literary oeuvre. She opined that every literalist should spread awareness among the people through their literature as it is the best way to express their inner anger towards agonies and miseries of the marginalized sections of the society.

Devi's entire literary oeuvre i.e. *Chhoti Munda and His Arrow*, *Aranyar Adhikar*, *Mother 1084*, *The Queen of Jhansi*, *The Fire Within*, and *Prothom Path* signify the rebel, outcry, contention against the upper class in India who exploited the tribal people. She stood against the caste inequalities, class biases, and gender discrimination standing with the oppressed people. She believed that Independence didn't transform the lives of marginalized people. Dominant class people always exploit these people and their condition is becoming worst. She also condemned the policies of government which didn't bring any alteration in the lives of women and downtrodden. These people have maltreated the tribals more than British. Devi meticulously raised the issues of tribal people and attempted to spread consciousness among the tribals regarding their rights through her entire literary oeuvre.

## 2. Review of literature

**Chakravorty, Shreya** (2014), '*Mahasweta Devi: Translated or Translocated*', present research deals with the significance of subaltern studies in analyzing Devi's approach. Various methodological tools have been used to analyze the text. Researcher attempts to find out the elements of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of Devi's literature. Spivak

added her own perspective while translating Devi's works. She also analyzes Samik Bandopadhyay's translation of the works of Devi and how he used the tone of a trustworthy translator.

**B. Vijaya** (2014) in her *Fiction of Mahasweta Devi: A Study of Class, Caste, and Gender* prominently deals with the gender discrimination, caste biases, and dominance of particular class on the marginalized people. Silences of the subaltern are meticulously measured in the Devi's work and it is precisely analyzed in the present research. Various issues such as bonded labours, miserable conditions of women, and tribals' exploitation is described. It highlights on the humanistic approach of Mahasweta Devi's literary works.

**Sharma, Dr. Anjali** (2017), *Works of Mahasweta Devi: A Critical Exploration*, discusses various subaltern issues in colonial and postcolonial context. Present work analyzes the condition of subalterns in India, colonialism and racial subalternity, postcolonialism and subaltern identity, and various postcolonial translations. It explores the beauty of Devi's writings and her contribution in awakening the conscience of tribal people. She also deals with the topics such as expulsion, denial, displacement and cultural erosion of the tribal people.

**Singh, Satpal** (2016), *Aesthetics of Protest: A Study of the Works of Mahasweta Devi*, critically analyzed the literary works of Mahasweta Devi. It is an apprehensive effort which glorifies her as an eminent writer with social cordiality and affection. It explores how dominant classes socio-economically exploit the marginalized people. Corrupt political leaders and government officials have worsen the condition of these people. Devi precisely explored the plight of tribal and inculcates the seeds of revolt in the minds of the people.

## 3. Research Methodology

Descriptive and analytical research methods are used in the present research. Data has been collected from primary as well as secondary sources. Mahasweta Devi's novels, short stories, interviews, unpublished and other works are used as a primary data sources and the works of other authors, research papers, speeches, various, magazine, newspaper articles are

used for the research as secondary data sources. Data is collected from the various sources regarding Devi's perspective towards social consciousness among the downtrodden people about their rights. Various concepts such as social consciousness, social evils, subaltern, feminism, casteism, self-identity, realism, marginalization are studied thoroughly and use in the research paper. Data regarding the research paper is taken from various sites, journals, magazines and newspaper articles.

#### 4. Significance of Mahashweta Devi's Literary Works in Tribal consciousness:

Mahashweta Devi's oeuvre contributed in awakening the spirit of tribal people regarding their upliftment. Her writings are the reflection of her own felt experiences. She journeyed through various tribal places and felt their miseries. She opined, "They trust me... You deny rights to these people, make them invisible, and then label them different! I live, eat and sleep with them as one of their family" (*Fire in the Heart*). Her works are the reflection of miseries and pathetic condition of subaltern people who are far from the mainstream society. Her literary works inculcate the feeling of revolt among these people and make them aware about their rights. Her protagonists are exploited socio-economically by the upper class people and later it culminated into the revolt against them. Devi considers economic development as a medium of extortion of natural resources in tribal areas. Government and corrupt political leaders exploits tribals in the name of economic welfare of these people. Both remain indifferent towards the problems i.e. education, health, land, water, wages, and employment.

*Bashai Tudu* is the perfect reflection of all these problems. It is the story of exploitation in which Pratap Goldar, the landlord, ruled over the entire village. He seizes all the government scheme forcibly from the tribals. He has several wells while villagers face the problem of water scarcity. *Bashai Tudu*, in regards with wages, says, "When I launched the struggle for the minimum wages, I discovered for the first time that the Labour Department had been raising the minimum wage every year. The government recorded suggestion for new laws and even reported the laws coming into force. But the minimum wage never came to us" (35). *Bashai Tudu* is the protagonist who is very much about tribal people's rights and he fights for it.

*Chhotti Mundar Teer* makes aware about the grave reality of institutionalized plot to keep tribals aloof from the benefits. She criticizes government's efforts to undermine tribal people's awareness about their rights. Tribals don't get anything though the schemes and policies are planned for the betterment of the tribals. She precisely exposed the marginalization of tribals by

upper caste mahajans. Chotti Munda expresses, "They have made the law for our good, but they never let it be known..." (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, 300). Thus, tribals never got the benefits of any government schemes and policies which are initiated for their development. They remain aloof from the so-called process of development.

Devi's *Rudali* is a short fiction which prominently deals with the story of a Sanichari, a woman belongs to low-caste. It is the reflection of traditions in Rajasthan state of India where upper-class women were kept in loneliness. *Rudali* express grieve over the death of aristocratic family's members on behalf of masked women who are not permitted to express grieve in the public. The novel precisely portrays the picture of Sanichari, a lower-caste woman who lead her life in very miserable condition. Devi's feministic approach reflects through this text. Sanichari's mother-in-law believes that she bring misfortune in the family because she born on an ominous day, Saturday. She and her community were deprived of the basic needs i.e. education, water, food, health, and electricity. Sanichari indirectly represents her caste, gender and class.

Devi is an astounding writer who has written electrifying literature to picture the issues of tribal people. Her literature is the reflection of direct encounter with contemporary social, economic and political system. She felt very crestfallen when she observed the problems of tribals and has awakened the spirit of these people by encouraging them for their social, economic, and political rights. Her plays, novels, and other literature are efficacious medium which portray the pathetic condition of these people. She meticulously intermingles culture, history, religion, and tradition as she always crave to expose the atrocities committed to the tribals. Her entire literary oeuvre is the powerful weapon to change the social, economic, and political system. In this way, her literary works are the medium of social, economic, and political consciousness. Her works awakens the spirit of tribal people and rejuvenate them.

#### 5. Conclusion

Precise analysis of Devi's literary works explores that she has worked for the betterment of the tribal as well as rural poor. She gives voice to the tribals and their social, economic, and political problems and strove hard for the subaltern consciousness. Her works have revolutionary spark which has the capability to bring metamorphic changes in the social and cultural sphere of India. She believes that the voices of subaltern people should be heard attentively; otherwise, they will become extinct species on the earth. She compels readers to brood over the rift between the social, cultural, economic, and political sphere of subaltern and mainstream society.

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