

## **Social Injustice and Exploitation in Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar***

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### **Abstract**

This Research article entitled “Social Injustice and Exploitation in Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar*. It explores the problems of Munda tribal community in West Bengal, India. Munda is a tribal community people in India, who face the communal problems from mainstream society. The Social Injustices and the Exploitation of tribal people by the mainstream society is clearly discusses through the novel *Aranyer Adhikar*, by Mahasweta Devi which deeply analyzed in this article about castism and land encroaching undergone by the Munda tribal society. This problem is alarming and insists the readers to fight against social odds through the characterization of Birsa. Thus, Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* is a record which makes the main stream society to understand the exploitations that the tribal community is the main argument of this article.

**Key Words:** Injustice, Exploitation, Intellectualism, Mainstream, Ideological.

Mahasweta Devi has involved in her writings deeply with the tribals and their life in the Chotanagpur region; she has written a number of novels, short stories and articles concerning tribal issues. Her writings on the tribes can be divided into two major themes: tribal history and the tribal's struggle for existence. Devi's efforts of writings help the indigenous people in reviving their past and give them a pride of place. Her narratives highlight the rich history and culture of the tribal of the Chotanagpur region which has been unfamiliar to the mainstream society in spite of the commitment and sacrifice.

Devi's writings, has professed with little interest in ideological abstractions and theorizing. Bengal is considered as a leftist intellectualism, for past four decades. She appropriated the ideological fervor as the tool for understanding if the social and economic problems of India and marginalized people. A zealous opposition to machinations of social injustice and exploitation is the red thread that binds all these themes and objective in her fiction.

Devi has poignantly delineated the stark and blatant subordinate of women in Indian society. She highlighted the irrespective of caste and class, particularly on the tribal or poor working women under the contract bonded labour system. Feminist scholars have find Devi's stark and powerful tales of women's oppression and their struggle as extremely fertile sites of feminist discourse. However, Devi dislikes being braided a feminist even though she asserts that a woman tends to be more vulnerable to exploitation because of her body as subject to more kinds of exploitation. For her it is one of the exploitation among the problems and issues linked class, caste and creed.

This research paper focuses on how tribal people find their life in the mainstream society, and how they living their life in a very deprived state, and the society treats them mercilessly. *Aranyer Adhikar* (1978) is a meticulously researched novel which deals with the Munda insurrection of 1899-1900. Interest of being just any historical novel about a past revolution, it gives clear indications of the tribal community itself, its traditions, social customs and religion. The new catholic Bengali, she carves out in this novel, the breakaway from literary Bengali of which Spivak speaks, only proves her intimacy with the Mundas and the village people has changed her very outlook on literature. Mahasweta Devi, armed literature as only a weapon, a weapon with which she wants to fight alongside the oppressed communities for achieving liberation from slavery and oppression.

In *Aranyer Adhikar*, Devi draws on the scattered oral traditions, of songs by tribals around Chotanagpur, for celebrating their hero-god Birsa Munda. The novelist intimate knowledge of the traditions and lifestyle of the Mundas gives her historical novel based on reality. Birsa is the hero-god whose life is myth of courage, endurance honesty and strength for the Munda people. This is a myth rooted in the tradition of Munda's existence and gives them ample hopes. Birsa is the first divine and mythical figure drawn by Mahasweta Devi. She knows no deity other than the godhead achieved by man through fortitude, faith, courage, and integrity. Birsa is a man, who keeps his head high and bows to no power on earth. Thus he is killed but not defeated, and he is apathy worshipped by the Bengali Christian, Amulya, and the Deputy Superintendent of Ranchi prison. Barrister Jacob, a British lawyer sympathetic towards the Mundas, asks Amulya why he considers Birsa to be a god, and Amulya says, "Why? because of betrayal and

treachery. Whenever man attains godhead, he is always defeated by some traitors. Ultimately he was captured through traitors, wasn't he?"(9)

The most important achievement of this novel is to uncover the real reason for the Munda insurrection. For the uneducated simple tribals, an armed revolt against the British Empire would have been undreamt of if the so-called gentlemen folk. Dhani Munda, who is an old wise man, who tells the story of these 'gentlemen' invaders destroying their peaceful village life in simple and direct way as:

People came from all sides. Those who came were 'dikus'. Those who caused our old 'khut-katti' village system to break down, those who evicted the Mundas and occupied their land, were 'dikus'. And they started the system of bonded labour. This meant working without wages.  
(32)

And the author comments: "And this was life for the likes of Dhani. Into it had intruded the money-lenders, zamindars, missionaries, jails, courts, asphalt roads, trains, bayonets, guns, lack of water, dry spells, famine, broker, and bonded labor" (32). The reality of Munda life drawn in this novel exposes the injustice meted out to the tribes of Indian villages for the first time. The masterly strokes of her pen conjure up before us the tribal people with their simplicity, faith and innate dignity, and she is able to whip up impatience in her readers with a social system that destroys their contented lives.

Apart from the social crisis, this work is considered as a successful novel. Gayathry Spivak calls it as "a meticulously research historical novel" (10), but this

meticulous research does not stand in the way of drawing a set of living characters who bring high emotional drama into the novel. The drama of personal relationships is played against a background of rude historical facts. Ranesh Dasgupta, in his review of the novel in Bengali Journal parichay wonders “how Mahasweta Devi keeps her novel on the tribal insurrection of absolutely free from harshness” (11). The delicate treatment of the relationship between Karmi, Birsa’s mother, and Birsa makes it a thing of exquisite beauty. The soft, touching love-relationship between sale and Birsa runs through the blood-spattered novel like a crystal spring. It is as though all the confusion, bloodshed, and hypocrisy do not really have any real power over these people. They keep their heart clear and innocent, and that is only thing which knows how to love.

The almost miraculous life of Birsa provides a focal point for the incidents of the novel that never gets lost in the mazes of history. Devi considered courage, and intelligence is the two qualities that make Birsa a hero. He is courageous and intelligent enough to lead a battle against British Raj, and intelligent enough to know the value of western education and educate himself at Christian mission. A fearless man, who is not afraid of renounce his faith in traditional Munda gods, and to pronounce himself as God. A method for his logical information performs what gives off an impression of being marvels for the uneducated Mundas and shows them better lifestyles. He is a true leader who knows their courage and ability through history and be able to turn the Munda community into true fighters. A truly radical thinker, he even allows the women to work in aid of the movement, thus tapping the resources for as much man-power as possible.

The author portrays here a primitive society in the process of change. Their messiah wins them over by means of the miracles that the civilized man understands to be the result of a scientific point of view. He teaches them the ways of cleanliness and abstinence and turns them into a worthy community. And a myth grows around his haloed figure, a figure of super human energy intelligence, courage, and determination. Devi returns again to them as a man becoming a myth, always centering her interest in the truly miraculous qualities of strength, dedication and honesty found in some born leaders of men.

However, the indigenous account however, represents him as primarily a religious leader an incarnation of God, a social reformer, counseling moderation, and calling upon his people to avoid extremist means of struggle. Through this novel Devi exposes the exploitation of the tribals and its effects on their lives physical as well as emotional. She makes an attempt to give a realistic picture of the movement. She exposes the crookedness, exploitativeness, and callousness of the British government authorities, and the ruthless and wily nature of non-aboriginal landlords, money lenders, and petty officials. The writer picks up the essential historical factors that were at work in this particular period in the history of the Munda tribe. Unlike writers who have been stimulated by tribal exotica and chose to the romantic and idealize tribal societies, Devi does not present a romanticized picture of the Munda tribe. Instead, she portrays the poverty – stricken, insecure and social injustice and exploitation faced in the lives of the tribal people for whom rice remained an eternal dream, where life meant wandering from one village to another due to ceaseless eviction by the ‘dikus; for whom land reclaimed from the forest was the basis of tribal life. As we can note in

the novel, Birsa's father Suguna's idea of happiness lies in getting two meals of boiled chana – seeds, wearing an un-form dhoti above the knees and sleeping under the in keet roof of a leafy hut. In this poverty – stricken world, even the attainment of bare necessities fills life with a regal grandeur. Devi portrays Suguna's world as follows:

This world of his had rigid borders. In that world one could become a king, if one got two meals of ghatu a day, four handloom dhoties in a year, the warmth of husk bags in the winter, escape from the clutches of the money – lender, 'mother' oil for lighting the lamp, black salt for 'ghatu,' forest roots and honey and meat of wild rabbits and birds. (51)

The novelist uses an ancient Munda as the narrator, and he tells the history of his tribe to the younger generation. She describes the system of exploitation in the direct and accurate language of one who has survived all this exploitation. In prison, Dhani tells the young Mundas:

Look, the first forefathers of Birsa's clan had founded Chotanagpur. But  
Someone else became the king and since  
then outsiders came to our land and forests and snatched away  
everything {...}. Ha! Look! The like wants a horse, the Munda will  
pay for it. The diku's wants will be supplied by a Munda. (21)

Mahasweta Devi shows her grasp of history in the foregoing extract. Her ability to detect the numerous historical forces that ate into the life of the tribal presents is evident in the novel. She also shows evidence of knowing the people and the times by her depiction of the way people like Dhani Munda lived-the manner in which

their lives had been intruded upon by the money-lenders, the zamindars, the missionaries, the jails, the courts, the tarred road, the trains, bayonets, guns, the drought, and the famines.

Social Injustices and the Exploitation of tribal people by the mainstream society is clearly depicted through the novel *Aranyar Adhikar*, which speaks about castism and land encroaching undergone by the Munda tribal society. Which is alarming and insist the readers to fight against social odds through the characterization of Birsa? Thus, Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyar Adhikar* is a record which makes the main stream society to understand the exploitations that the tribal communities.

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