

## TRIBAL OUTCRY IN THE NOVEL OF MAHASHWETA DEVI

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the depiction of tribal outcry and resistance in the novels of Mahasweta Devi, a doyenne Indian author renowned for her scrutiny of deprived and marginalized communities. Devi's works, such as Hajar Churashi Maa and Breast Story, offer a heart-touching depiction of the struggles encountered by tribal communities in India, highlighting issues of oppression, deprivation, exploitation, displacement, and social injustice. Devi's exemplary stories strengthened the voice of unheard tribal communities against the state-sponsored oppression and humiliations of their rights. Devi uses the old methodology of old wives' tales and symbolism. We can see glimpses of her social activism in her works. The study demonstrates Devi's dedication to influencing mainstream society's perception of tribal and marginalized people. The paper evokes a powerful sense of tribal resistance against the erosion of their land and culture due to development and globalization. Devi portrays tribal women as heroes of her stories as well as victims. Devi's writing cast light upon the complexity of tribal day-to-day life. It shows how tribal women became the victims of exploitation. There is a strong sense of rage against authoritarian tenure, including colonial and postcolonial. Devi's works position her as the torchbearer of tribal culture. She rose to prominence as one of the leading contemporary writers.*

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**Keywords:** Mahasweta Devi, Resistance, Oppression, Social Injustice, Marginalization, Exploitation, Doyen, Old Wives', Land, Authoritarian, Torchbearer, Colonial.

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### Introduction

This paper emphasizes the renowned work of Mahasweta Devi, a famous author and social activist eminent for her authentic depiction of marginalized communities. Devi, born in 1926 in Dhaka, exhausted her life championing the cause of the exploited, deprived, and the dispossessed, especially the tribal communities. Her writings include various short fables and novels that show glimpses of the harsh reality of social injustice and the struggles of deprived and tribal communities against the dictatorship of the government system.

Devi's work is unique in its authentic depiction of socio-political equations; it represents the complexity of tribal life and the prolonged struggle for identity and rights. From her very first novel, Jhansir Rani" (1956), to her subsequent works such as "Aranyer Adhikar" (1979) and "Bashai Tudu" (1992), Devi's work has consistently documented tribal tales, their shared sense of identity, resistance, and survival amidst severe oppression and marginalization (Mukherjee, 2009).

### Significance of the Study

Scholars have analyzed Mahasweta Devi's works from a variety of perspectives, such as ecofeminism, feminism, colonialism, and tribal studies. However, the themes of this paper provide a more accurate portrayal of tribal plights, resistance, and their complex relationship with the land they inhabit.

By exploring Devi's works, the study believes it can provide an extensive understanding of her narration style and the vivid implications of her portrayals within Indian literature and society.

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In an era where tribal voices are often marginalized, understanding the complexity and depth of their struggles through literature contributes to the discourse on their rights and recognition (Kumar, 2016). The study focuses on highlighting her work's existence in the

The study also seeks to highlight the continued relevance of Devi's work in the same literary landscape, showcasing the power of literature in society.

## Literature Review

### Studies on Mahasweta Devi's Works

- **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988):** In her historic work *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak analyzes two famous short stories, Draupadi and Breast-Giver. She defends that Devi's narratives escalate the unheard voice of subaltern, marginalized communities, particularly tribal. Spivak's analysis focuses on the connectedness of class, caste, and identity clashes.
- **Amit Kumar (2016):** In *Mahasweta Devi and the Narrative of Marginality: A Critical Reading 'Rudali, 'li'* Kumar examines the contention of marginality and empowerment in Devi's work. He focuses on a famous storRudali, *Rudali* highlighting how the lead character's resistance against the dominating and oppressive socio-economic system.
- **Joya Chakravarty (2008):** In *Mahasweta Devi: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, Chakravarty put together a bunch of critical essays that examine various perspectives of Devi's writing. The anthology gives a deeper understanding of themes such as subalternity, resistance, survival, and social injustice, offering a vital view of Devi's literary contribution to understanding marginalized communities in India.
- **Indrani Sen (2002):** In *Woman and Empire: Representations in the Writings of British India (1858-1900)*, Sen explores the delineation of women in Devi's works, especially tribal women. Sen argues the connectedness of caste, class, and gender in Devi's depiction of these women and examines how Devi uses her stories as a shade of resistance against colonial and patriarchal oppression, catching heed to the plight of marginalized women.
- **Nivedita Sen (2010):** In *Mahasweta Devi's Tribal Perspectives on Community Forest Rights, Conservation, and Development*, Nivedita Sen examines the connection between tribal communities and their environment in Devi's works. Sen addresses that Devi's works challenge the wrong policies of the government and try to stand against the exploitation of tribals.
- **Bir Singh (2017):** In *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of out Asia*, Bir Singh analyzes Devi's works to examine the theoretical part of Subaltern Studies. He argues how Devi's stories set a platform for the unheard voices of the marginalized, highlighting their struggles and resistance against undemocratic systems.

### Devi's Portrayal of Tribal Life and Resistance

#### • Themes of Oppression and Marginalization

Devi's works provide a prominent portrayal of marginalized and tribal life, keeping together narratives of their identity struggle, social injustice, socio-cultural ethos, and the constant resistance against their land dispossession, oppression, and marginalization. The theme of tribal plight is the main theme of Devi's portrayal of tribal communities. In her short stories, she broadly explains the heterogeneous oppression faced by these communities, radiating from the socio-political and economic system. The characters often grapple with dominating repressive forces such as culture clashes, exploitation, gender discrimination, identity crisis, land dispossession, and systemic negligence. In "Aranyer Adhikar," for example, she depicts the forced displacement of tribal communities from their ancestral lands and their subsequent impoverishment and exploitation (Devi, 1977).

Devi's work also presents a strong evaluation of the marginalization of tribal people. She illuminates how tribals are deprived and marginalized within mainstream society, encountering cultural degradation and socio-economic exclusion. In "Draupadi," the protagonist epitomizes the marginalization and disenfranchisement experienced by tribal women, particularly the violation of their bodies and agency (Devi, 1978).

Devi has represented tribal characters as just victims of oppression and marginalization, but she also represents their power of resistance against their exploitation. Devi's characters resonate deeply because of their powerful portrayal. Devi elucidates their struggles for livelihood, rights, dignity, and cultural degradation.

- **Tribals' Struggle for Identity and Dignity**

Devi's works showcase the relentless struggle for retaining their rights, dignity, and identity in the name of dominating and systemic neglect and cultural degradation in her prominent work. Identity holds significant importance in every community. Devi represents the important role of cultures, tradition, and language in shaping their identities. In "Chotti Munda and His Arrow," she tells the story of the protagonist Chotti, a tribal man, and his lifelong struggle to retain his tribal identity amid the pressures of modernization and cultural assimilation (Devi, 1973).

Self-esteem and dignity are strong subthemes in Devi's short stories. Her work represents the tribals' struggle to stop the erosion of their dignity amidst various forms of harassment and exploitation. Her narratives accentuate characters' strong resistance against systemic power's exploitation. For instance, in "Draupadi," the protagonist Draupadi resists her oppression and asserts her dignity in the face of brutal physical violation. The act of resistance underlines the theme of claiming one's dignity even in the most inhumane circumstances (Devi, 1978).

Devi depicts the struggle of tribals as a community's collective efforts to preserve their culture, identity, and dignity. She focuses on their unity against oppressive and dominating power.

Through these portrayals, Devi artfully represents the tribals' persistent pursuit of their identity and dignity.

#### **Analysis of Major Works**

"**The Book of the Hunter**," originally published as "Byadh Khanda" in Bengali, is one of Devi's significant works that critically explores the intricate dynamics of power structures and their impacts on tribal communities (Devi, 1985). The story revolves around Mary Oraon, a tribal woman who takes on the role of a political activist, fighting against the social exploitation of her community. Devi, through the powerful characterization of Mary Oraon, represents the strong resistance of tribal people as a fighter, not a victim.

Devi scabbles about the socio-political system that conserves the exploitation and oppression of tribal communities, explaining how the structured system is responsible for the marginalization of tribals. Devi artfully unveils how wrong policies and dominating power structures contribute to the exploitation of tribals. She explains that exploitation became part of the system in the post-colonial and colonial eras. These dominating power structures compel tribal people to live in starvation, poverty, and an anonymous life in their own country.

Devi's short stories don't only criticize external socio-political dominating and patriarchal systems but also go to the internal structure of power in tribal communities. Through her story, she raises the root issues of gender discrimination and the subordination of tribal women within communities. She raises the issue of women's exploitation within tribal communities.

However, "The Book of the Hunter" is not only a story of a tribal victim. It creates a strong presentation of refusal to accept the tyranny of systemic power. Devi tries to accentuate the tribal community's resilience and continuous struggle against the oppressive power system.

#### **Mother of 1084": Resisting Loss and Tragedy**

"Mother of 1084," also well known as "Hajar Churashir Maa" in Bengali, is a famous story that examines themes of loss, tragedy, and resistance (Devi, 1974). The focus of the novel is not the representation of tribal communities; it represents a larger and significant aspect of their socio-political marginalization and resistance.

The story moves around Sujata, the protagonist, a mourning mother who lost her son, Brati, who was an active member of a radical communist group called Naxalite by the state forces. The title "Mother of 1084" is not just a number of creations of the writer's mind; it refers to the code number given to her son's dead body in the mortuary.

Although the novel represents a middle-class protagonist, it provides a wide picture of socio-political turmoil in India during the late 1960s to early 1970s. It is a period that represents unrest and revolts among tribals. Brati, associated with a Naxalite movement, had strategic and significant participation in the revolt against feudal oppression and land dispossession.

In her narrative style, Devi symbolizes a critique of the dominating and oppressive state power structures that neglect the voices of marginalized people. Through the story of Brati and Sujata, Devi shows the harsh and cruel face of state repression.

"Mother of 1084" thus represents a prominent story of resisting loss and tragedy, giving an emotional and personal aspect to the illustrative socio-political combat.

#### **Aranyer Adhikar": Land, Forest, and Tribal Rights**

"Aranyer Adhikar, or Rights to the Forest, is one of Devi's influential works that ferrets out the struggle of tribals for their land and forest resources (Devi, 1977).

The plot of the novel, set in the late 19th century, follows the life of a tribal leader, Birsa Munda, who was a torchbearer in the revolt against the British regime to recuperate the rights of the Munda community to their forestland and resources. Devi symbolizes the historical figure of Birsa Munda to represent the resistance against exploitation and their love for their land. It shows an intimate connection between the Munda community and forests. Devi critiques the British policies that deprived them of their lands and forced them to live a limited life.

The colonial government's Permanent Settlement Act and the Forest Rights Act separated tribal communities from their lands and forests, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and exploitation (Ghosh, 2005). Devi paints a very clear picture of this.

In "Aranyer Adhikar," land and forest are not just physical entities; they hold symbolic significance representing the identity, culture, and livelihoods of tribal communities. By emphasizing their deep-seated connection with the land, Devi underscores the profound loss experienced by these communities due to their displacement (Banerjee, 2010).

"Aranyer Adhikar" represents a strong narrative that highlights the significance of land and forest in tribal life and their persistent struggle for their rights.

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