

Social and Cultural Aspects of Tribes in Mahasweta Devi's Novel 'The Book of the Hunter': A Study

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Abstract:

The present Article deals with the social and cultural aspects of tribes from various perspectives. If we want to comprehension of the India's social and cultural history. It is essential to read and understand the history of the tribals. The social and cultural aspects or identity not the identity of individual experience, but it connects the whole community. Tribals are the aboriginal people first countrymen among the others. They usually live in communities. Tribals have their own set of beliefs, myths, superstitions, traditions, customs, rituals and culture. Every Indian tribal have the sublime culture and tradition. Mahasweta Devi describes culture differences like settlement pattern, dress, and ornaments, economic life, believes, and worship manners, customs and folk traditions. Mahasweta Devi presented tribal exploitation, miserable condition. Mahasweta Devi wants to give voice to Shabar Tribal people.

Key words: Shabars, Culture, Abhayachandi, Bride-price, Oppressed, Traditions, Exploitation, Kallya Shabar, Pullora, Identity.

Introduction:

Mahashweta Devi's novel The Book of the Hunter published in Bengali as Byadhakhanda and later translated into English by Mandira and Sagree Sengupta. Devi tries to revive the history of Shabar culture. She depicted cultural aspects associated with nature and forest. She tries to recreate the oral culture of the Shabars. They try to restore the self-respect. Shabars are rich in culture, traditions and customs. They are the most primitive tribes live in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha. They called as aboriginal, Bhumi Jana or Adivasi. This novel set in Araha Forest of Medinipur district in West Bengal. It gives an account of oral culture, songs, folk tales, customs, traditions and their practices.

Devi tries to reveal the culture, myths, customs and life style of the Shabar tribe. She describes that as they get food, shelter learn lessons from nature. For tribals, nature is their lifeline. They know each and every aspect of land, water, and forest. They strictly follow the forest rules and regulations. Their entire life moves around the forest. They celebrated the festival like Abhayachandi, myths, customs and ceremonies are based on forest. These activities indicate that they knew very well how to maintain balance between man and nature.

She describes the cultural values of the Shabars' and their gradual cultural decline in the novel. She focused the socio-cultural aspects of the tribal community in her novel. The position and issues of Shabars tribal community in the sixteenth century is briefly discussed in *The Book of the Hunter*. Mahasweta Devi tries to reflect the problems of tribal people in the society to make them visible to the real world. Therefore, this paper focuses on lifestyle, culture, and relationship in a happy way instead of thinking the problem as a sad one. The novel recounts tribal routine life and their tradition of individuals in the forest and in the city.

Devi describes the Mukunda's life and tribal couple Tejota's son Kallya and his beloved wife Phuli. They lived in Abhaya Forest. They gather the forest products and sold in the villages. Shabar lived like a one family with their leader Danko. They lived in the forest to protect the Abhayachandi Temple but gradually mainstream communities start expanding their settlements into the forest where they dwelled for centuries.

They are very intimated with forest they thought forest is their guru. They learned hunting skills, Art of Living skills in their forest with minimum forest products. They practiced hunting and food gathering most of the Shabars are cultivators, few were agricultural workers, and remaining tribal's are engaged in other works. But hunting and gathering is the main occupation of the Shabar tribes. They depended forest for fruits, leaves, flower, roots, medicinal herbs provided by forest only. They find self-sufficient life in the forest. They sell the forest products in the market. In return they bought rice and other grains including salt and oil. They went to forest for hunting and women went to market for selling products. Men and women work equally. Many times, women work harder than men. For example, Phuli went to forest along with Kallya for hunting. Phuli went to market to buy rice, salt, oil and Pepper to quench their hunger. Women provide daily food but men provide hunting animals for them. They eat rice occasionally. Phuli sells meat, honey, raisin, tubers and skin in the market.

Phuli and Kallya struggled a lot for leading their prosperous life. They lived in huts made up of leaves and vines. Kallya build own hut with grass and leaves. That house easily takes off and shifted in times of need. Most of the time they collect food from the forest only. They didn't give more importance to cultivation. Megha Shabar father of Kallya never shows interest in farming due to the frequently shifting from one place to another place and intrusion of the outsider so Megha teaches Kallya to collect forest products like meat, skin, husk and etc. Mukunda very close to Shabar for studying their culture, traditions and customs but Kalya expressed his resentment. The Goddess Abhayachandi gave you Pooja for work, books, a granary and cowshed but we got forest, we are Shabars we are children of the forest. Kallya believed that mother forest will take care of and protect them difficult situation. They enjoyed life eating and drinking.

They followed rules and regulations while hunting the animals that indicates they are the nature loving people. They are the protector of the forest. They protect forest any kind of threat. They amended marriage rules for protect forest and nature. This indicates they are the true guardians of the forest. Danko expresses displeasure of unlimited demands of men. Danko proclaimed for killing of the animal on the occasion of the marriage only

5 dear skin, one white boar these are the rules of the Danko. He restricted Shabars to hunt pregnant dear or any other animals in the Abhaya forest. If they killed any single animal, deity will punish them severely.

They believe the respect of the nature. They balanced with their traditions, culture and customs maintaining the ecological balance. They never killed any animal for pleasure or unnecessary. If tiger is hungry, it kills dear, when elephant eats leaves, twigs from bamboo and banyan tree. They strictly follow the rules and regulations. Once Meghafather of Kallya killed pregnant deer. He loses the eligibility to head of the community. They believed Abhaya is the creature, nurture and protector of living beings on earth. They don't have any kind of law; they treat everyone is equal but forest law is ultimate for them.

Shabar marriage systems are different from main stream society. A girl went to the forest for hunting on the occasion of marriage with bow and arrow. She tried to hunt whatever available in the forest. They practiced polygamy. They don't have any kind of dowry system instead of dowry the bride's father will give deer skin, elephant hides, tiger skins, tiger claws and elephant tusks. They sold in the market and buy the needed. In their community getting the bride is very difficult. Because bride's father stick on the rules and regulations. Boys married a Mango tree before married a girl. They believe that they give the life, nourishment and shelter. A tree creates another tree through seeds like their progeny continuous like this. After marriage they lived separately or they must build their own hamlet. Shabars have the remarriage system. When their husbands are dead. A widow is allowed to marry her late husband's younger brother. They gave very much priority to marriages in their own community to strengthen their number.

Women are honored and respected in their community. Tejota is an elderly women respected a lot. She called as encyclopedia. She knew about Abhaya Forest that was inherited by her father Danko. He knew about the medicine, herbs, knowledge of capturing the elephant and animals. With his all the qualities he became the head of the community. One who knows everything about tribal community like the Danko? The community will honor them eventually.

Head of the community played important role for maintaining the tradition and culture. The eldest in the family appointed as a head of the community. All the people went and ask for the pois time and date for celebrating the festival. They didn't bend their head in front of any other king. They are very courageous. They didn't consider any person as a king. They never wanted any affiliation with any other king. They fight for king when enemies are attacked.

Tejota tells story 'One day Akheteya encounters the golden monitor lizard. He would become the king of the forest hence they try to protect the Abhaya temple in the forest. Mahasweta Devi portraits they are making lot of effort to revival of their glory from the erosion and the fading. Danko spends lot of times near Abhaya temple for searching the Amrutaganda. He thought that if he ate this plant he regained his youth, then he would marry Shabar lady and spread his generation in the forest. They married Sal tree with Mohal tree in the

Palguna month with singing and dancing to keep away from the problems. Despite the lot of efforts had done by Danko, he didn't find Amritaganda.

They believe that Abhayachandi protects all from the evils, sufferings and problems. Tribals are living with hopes and beliefs. Shabars' fear to use the Jahira trees wood if so, that person would be expulsion from the community. Grove deities are responsible for the crops and stopped spreading the diseases. They practiced different kind of ritual and norms for Abhayachandi, while they are going to hunting in the forest. When Kallya went for hunting, Phuli wore a red saree with Kumkum and prayed in front of Goddess, invoking 10 mantras. Tejota was observing all the performance. She replied that your hardship days are over. If Kallya could kill the elephant certainly he would find Golden Monitor Lizard. Then he became king of the forest.

Conclusion:

Mahasweta Devi portrays the importance and necessity of Shabars in the forest as well as society. She explores the cultural values of their festivals, rituals, traditions, and customs. They are different from main stream society. Marriage customs, funeral rites, rituals, hunting approaches, marriages code of conducts, bride price system are very unique and sublime. There is no gender disparity. Equality is the basic concept. They try to protect the respect of women. They have lot of attachment towards the land, forest and water. The main objective of writing this article is protect and respect of age-old traditions and customs of Shabars.

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