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THE EXTREMITY OF TRIBAL PEOPLE IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S "SHISHU"

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ABSTRACT

Mahasweta Devi is a well renowned writer for voicing the upheavals of the tribal people whose tears are mostly unnoticed or undervalued. Being an active member of several social welfare groups and tribal welfare associations, she made her personal life her social activities, she made her personal life her social activities and creative writing. Complementary to one another since she indulges herself in the activities of uplifting marginalized sections of the society we can feel a kind of candid situations and characterization in her writings. She transforms whatever she has observed in her everyday life into writing, which makes her writings realistic and makes her readers feel walking in to the streets of their own land. This paper aims at excavating the plight of the tribal people portrayed by Mahasweta Devi in her short story "Shishu".

Keywords :- Extremity, Ecocriticism, Aagariyan tribe, Bio- conservation, Indigenous

Introduction

My paper is on the short story "Shishu" by Mahasweta Devi and was first published in 1979. This story has been published under various titles: I would be referring to "Little Ones" in the book Bitter Soil: stories by Mahasweta Devi translated by Ipsita Chandra. In this been literally and figuratively crippled in post independent India. Mahasweta Devi's undaunted commitment to the cause of denotified tribes in the ignored areas of the nation has made her an activist writer authentically documents the stirring experiences of tribal lives. Devoting over a quarter of a century to the kheria shabar tribes in Purulia, West Bengal she is passionately concerned with the rehabilitation of denotified tribes. The landless tribal who live half-clad in their dilapidated huts seem to be a slapping reality in the face of humanitarian and proudly democratic nation. Providing the fundamental human rights like drinking water, walk-able roads, livable houses, health and literacy to these wandering tribes is the first urgency to be felt and heeded by the government. People like Baba Amte and Mahasweta Devi fight for such a cause but how far one initiating leader can strive and how long the urban-centric nation is going to evade such responsibility.

Summary

The short story "Little Ones" is an unusual narrative which describes the unsettling encounter between the relief officer and Aagariyan tribe in a famine struck village. This relief officer has been named Mr. Singh who has been sent to help and in long term rehabilitate the tribal. This story has elements of a ghost story and of a

social documentary. Mahasweta Devi has tried to describe what lack of nutrition and starvation has done to the human body. I would quote Mahasweta Devi, "Starvation over generations can reduce ordinary sized human beings to pygmies. This is exactly what happens in the story the "Little Ones", who are described as supernatural kids are in reality adult Aagariya, shrunk in size. From the beginning of the story the Aararian tribe is describe by the government officials as uncivilized, "jungle" and who have "no honest way of living". We get to know by the conversation between the BOD and the relief officer that professionally the tribe were iron miners who have been gives barren land for cultivation. Their traditional profession has been taken away from them and forced to work as farmers on barren land. The topography of the region is vividly described by Mahasweta Devi and she stresses that the area is "barnt- out desert" so, evidently even if the tribal are given land, they won't be able to cultivate. But the BOD suggest that it is the tribal who lack incentive to cultivate the land and find reasons to sell it off. In the narrative the government and their officials are shown as insensitive towards tribe and their culture. They take over their land in order to extract iron. The blast of the hillock by the officials makes the Aagariyas out rageous. They kill the officials and flee to the dense forest in a way that are never found. The protest is the result of taking away of the land and the government reciprocates it by burying down the village and heavily taxing the remaining villages. The relief officers who came to the villages have a romanticized image of the tribal, "adivasi men play the flute and adivasi women dance with flowers in their chair" (Little Ones). They are socially and culturally removed from the actual condition and when they came in contact with it they find it grotesque. They new relief officer, Mr. Singh is presented as an honest and sympathetic official, who does everything help the people. But it is not enough because the people are in this condition due to the negligence, ignorance and insensitivity of the government official themselves. Also Mr. Singh wants to amend things but persuading them convert into agriculturists. They key issue in this story is deprivation of food such that the village boys are willing to work at the relief camp solely for food and without wages. But the condition of the kubha tribe who hide in the forest is much worse. They can neither produce within the forest due to the harsh climante and arid terrain nor can they come out as they would be short dead. Their demeanour might have changed but the resistance in their gesture make them seem ghost- like. The kubha tribe' did not know anything about theft banditry robbery are compelled to it begins with the entry of a relief officer, Mr. Singh, who is informed entertained and warned by the BDO and the driver leading him to a 'a damned terrible place' called "Lohri", where the inhabitants have no honest way of living Devi's articulation of ' honest way in italics indicates a tone of subtle ridicule of the honesty as defined in the socially accepted terms. Away from the urbanized society this is the bizarre land where the vultures devour even living bodies. The relief officer is fearlessly marching in his duties through his audition of the myth of the sun-god and jwallamukhi, the horrifying fables of little children like ghosts stealing the stuff of the relief and the historically frightening tales of those jungle folk from kubha who disappeared once for all after the drastic rebellion and blasts. The story progressively builds a sense of mystery, terror and suspense till it comes to a sudden climax at the end only to break the expectations of the reader in extremely cruel turn. It conclude not simply at the height of irony and pathos, brutality and horror but at the utmost degree of unimagined guilt, shame, confrontation and confession blasting out of the illusory nobility of the educated, civilized and sophisticated representative relief officer. They had seen adivasi men and women singing and dancing in hindi films with flowers in their heads and leaves on their tips but now it is a frustrating sight for him to find them half-naked, worm- ridden and swollen with songs like the lonely wailing of an old witch. The relief officer stands for every member of the culture society whose urbanized sensibility is shot dead by devi's revelation of the pigmy-tribal creature that are only normal human beings abnormally shrunk into dwarfs dew to the undernourishment. In the last scene of the story the relief officer encounters these Little Ones who are not small children but adult human beings who have been shrinking physically for the want of food, "chronic malnutrition has the result of stunting human and animal bodies.. Starvation over generations can reduce ordinary sized human beings into pygmies such on exposure of injustice lashes the mind not only of the officer but of the reader and the officer's normally is converted into maddening guild and shame. Men and women nakedly ridiculing the relief officer for all culture that he has as retaliation on so called sophistication and culture. In fact it is a crude attack on the self centered chanel of history of civilization by the dark and unseen corners of brutality left behind by the ever-marching progressive

society. The shrunken bodies of kubha tribals actually present the impotent policies of human progress relief officer sensibility is shattered into insanity as madness seems to be the only refuge for the outburst normalcy at a point of breaking disillusionment. Little Ones is an intolerable slap into the face of relief schemes of the government that seem to be an ongoing force and nothing more than the blindness of tribal beliefs and the helplessness of the aged members of tribe rather appear to be more natural than the rationally developed order to society as such. The idealizing policies for so named relief offered to those who can expose the truth that is unrelieving for all of us.

Conclusion

Most of the characters in Mahasweta Devi's writings are not merely imaginary but people she has personally met. The short story "Little Ones" not only speaks about the documented reality but also highlights the need for the biocentric equality that all entities in the ecosphere have equal intrinsic value. Therefore within the biological community, nature and the human are not only dependent each other but equal as well.

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