

New Historicism and Mindscapes in Mahasweta Devi's Aranyer Adhikar

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Abstract

Post-Colonialism as a literary theory deals with literature produced in countries that once were colonies of other countries especially of the European colonial powers Britain, France, and Spain, in some contexts, it includes countries still in colonial arrangements. Post colonialism deals with cultural identity in colonized societies: the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule; the ways in which writers articulate the celebrate that identity the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized people has been generate and used to serve the colonizer's interests; and the ways in which the colonizer's literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonized as a perpetually inferior people, society and culture. These inward struggles of identity, history and future possibilities often occur in the metropolis and ironically with the aid of postcolonial structures of power such as universities. Mahasweta Devi is a Bengali writer of many novels, short stories and plays. The important theme in her works involves the position of tribal communities within *Araneyr adhikar* (Rights of the Forests) is the first novel where Mahasweta Devi articulates tribal history with colonial and post colonial history. Much of her earlier work was concerned with colonial history and pre- colonial history. Birsa Munda, a tribal leader and a folk hero, belongs to the Munda tribe who was behind the Millenarian movement that rose in the tribal belt of modern day. This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer.

KEYWORDS: New Historicism, Post colonialism, marginalization

Introduction

Post-Colonialism is accounting for and combating the residual effects of colonialism cultures. It is not simply concerned with salvaging past worlds, but learning how the world can move beyond this period together towards a place of mutual respect. Some post colonial theorists make the argument that studying both dominant knowledge sets and marginalized ones as binary opposites perpetuates their existence as homogenous entities. Gayathri Chakravarty Spivak's main contribution of post- colonial theory came with her specific definition to the term subaltern. She also introduced term such as 'essentialism'. The former term refers to the dangers of reviving subaltern voices in ways that might simply heterogeneous groups, creating stereotyped impressions of their diverse group. Such believes that essentialism can sometimes be used strategically by these groups to make it easier for the subaltern to be heard and understood when a clear identity can be created and accepted by the majority. It is important to distinguish that strategic essentialism does not sacrifice its diversity and voices but that they are being downplayed temporarily to support the essential element of the group. Post colonialism

deals with cultural identity in colonized societies: the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule; the ways in which writers articulate and celebrate the identity ; the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized (subordinated) people has been generated and used to serve the colonizer's interests: and the way In which the colonizer's literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonized as a perpetually inferior people, society and culture. These inward struggles of identity, history, and future possibilities often occur in the metropolis and ironically, with the aid of post colonial structures of power such as universities. Mahasweta Devi is one of the writers associated with post colonialism.

Mahasweta Devi is a Bengali writer of many novels, short stories and plays. The important theme of her works involves the position of tribal communities within India. She is a long- term champion for the political social and economic advancement of these communities, whom she characterizes as “suffering spectators of the India that is travelling towards the twenty-first century” (Imagery Maps xi). Their concern s can be seen in works such as *Araneyr Adhikar* (Rights of the Forest) and anthologies such as her 1979 *Nairhite Megh* (Clouds in the South Western Sky). *Araneyr Adhikar* which was published in 1977 is based on the life of Birsa Munda, a freedom fighter who is the important figure in the history of the Indian independence movement. Birsa's devotion to his people was such that he was almost revered as God by his followers. By the time he was in 20s, his activities in the tribal areas of Jharkhand state had already begun to worry the British establishment to a considerable extent. He was finally caught by the British on 3rd February 1900, when he was 25 years old. He died soon after words in mysterious circumstances on 9th June 1900 in Ranchi jail.

The tribal religion Munda is also known as Horohon or Mura, which means headman of the village. They believe that they are the descendents of Sing Bonga, the supreme God. The Munda, an ancient people also lent their name to the language called Astro-Asiatic or Mundari or Kolarian, which is one of the four language families of India. Munda were originally inhabitants of north-west India, who later moved to Chotanagpur plateau of Bihar and settled there after clearing the forests. There were divisions among the Munda based on ecology. The divisions were Hasada, the upland of the pure Mundas and pure Mundari, Naguri, east of Khunti and Tamar, and Panchparanga including Tamar, the low lying lands of mixed culture. They are divided into two broad divisions, namely the Kompat Munda and the Khangar or Pattar munda, the high and the low categories, respectively. Among the Khanger group there are weavers known as Tamaria Munda. The Munda speak Mundari, one of the major Austro Asiatic languages, Sari and Hindi, are used for inter-group communication. The Devanagari script is used by them. The Munda are shortly short-structured, or of below medium height with along head tending towards round shape. In general, their faces with broad and long faces in equal proportions. Their nasal shape, in general, is short and wide. They are non-vegetarians and eat pork, but not beef. Rice is their staple food. Occasionally wheat, maize and Maura are also taken. They are fond of a homemade rice beer (haria) and distilled country liquor (daru). Men drink these beverages almost regularly, but the women consume these occasionally. They are fond of chewing tobacco and betel leaves. They prefer adult marriage, but there is also child marriage. Monogamy is the common form, though polygamy is permitted. A vermilion mark and an iron bangle worn on the

left arm are the symbols of married women. They pay bride price both in cash and kind. The Munda are patrilocal. Divorce are permitted and either the man or the woman are initiated it. The offender among the spouses is punished by the imposition of a fine. The children of the divorced couple live with their father. Remarriage (sagi) is permitted for widows, widowers and divorcees. They live both in nuclear and extended types of families but prefer the nuclear type. The property of the deceased person is divided equally among his sons. Sometimes the eldest son gets a large share than the others. An unmarried woman or spinster has only the right to maintenance.

The Munda are mainly nature worshippers. They also worship their ancestors. The Sing Bonga is their most one important deity, who is the source of all power and energy. Marangbaru is another deity. They also worship clan and village deities. Festivals like Sarhul, Karma, Jitia, Manda, Diwali, Dussehra, Soharai, Kharwaj, Deothan and Sivarathri are observed by them. The Munda were probably the first tribal people to resist the pressure of Colonialism, and revolted repeatedly over agrarian issues. Spivak recognizes the project is problematic, as recovery and presentation of a subaltern voice would likely essentialize its message, negating the subaltern masses heterogeneity, “strategic essentialism”-speaking on behalf of a group while using a clear image of identity to fight opposition- is the only solution to this problem. In *Araneyr Adhikar*, Birsa Munda is named with great respect as one of the freedom fighters in the Indian struggle for independence against British colonialism. This is an intervention. A message from the space in the margin that is a sight of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality is the space (site) of resistance.

“By Revolution we mean that the present order of thing, which is based on manifest injustice, must change”(Waraich and Sadhu 50). These detailed explanation aimed as much at the magistrate and the colonial Government; as at the Indians who were interested in their country’s political stagnation. By discussing the concern about soul and economic exploitation of the multitudes of lower level social groups how their struggle was for the upliftment of the masses, not for the upper classes only. These strategies of the Government to work through laws, and regulations we meant to support the English men’s claim that their rule was the ‘rule of law’ and the treatment of the prisoners was just. The prisoners who refused to remain helpless victims, they are to a large extent, could wrest some kind of power from the authorities, and influence the situation. This tussle was in itself a conflict between the authorities and the prisoners, who now had only their existential freedom to assert their presence. Through their continuous conflict the prison which was meant to silence and isolate them from the rest of the county rather become a vital location of colonial resistance.

To sum up...

Birsa Munda, the leader of the Munda tribe captures in the armed conflict against the ‘outsiders’ invading their forests. He was caught and prisoned and kept in humiliating dirty conditions. When he died in June 1900 a large number of tribal people collected outside the prison, suspecting foul play. Mahasweta Devi effectively depicts the helplessness of the Brave Birsa once he is inside the prison. There were several prison protests in the colonial prisons in the 19th century as recent sociological research has

amply demonstrates. But these protests were made in isolation and for needs about food preparation.

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