

FOURTH WORLD AND ITS REFLECTION IN MAHASWETA
DEVI'S FOLKLORE FICTION THE BOOK OF THE HUNTER

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The conceptualized framework of Fourth world came into existence with the publication of George Manuel book "The Fourth World: An Indian Reality" in 1974. The term originated with a remark by Mbutu Milando, the first secretary of the Tanzanian High Commission in Canada in conversation with George Manuel chief of the National Indian Brotherhood of Canada. Milando stated that 'when Native People came into their own, on the basis of their own cultures and traditions, that will be the Fourth World'. The Fourth World incorporates all ethnic, racial, caste, linguistic, gender, even socio-political and economic marginal. Manuel's campaign from brotherhood to nationhood found its resonance in all the aspects of indigenous people. Throughout his work George Manuel alludes to a history of shared experiences among the indigenous communities of the world who are struggling for self-determination and identity. He suggests that Fourth World enters the historical consciousness of the globe, it arguably beacons the most dramatic history of transculturation ever witnessed. He furthermore registers the language used to divide the world systematically in accordance with a variety of empirical formulations that adhere to notions of economic development. It is George Manuel, the most powerful & revered Indigenous leader of Canada advocated the political unification of indigenous people across the globe by sowing

the seed of the Fourth World Movement & gave prominence to the Concept of Fourth World.

The concept of Fourth World is somewhat different from Nation State like First World and Third World. A Nation state is a type of state that joins the political entity of a State to the cultural entity of a nation from which it aims to derive its political legitimacy to rule and potentially its status as a Sovereign State. A state is a political and geographical entity whereas a Nation is a cultural and ethnic one. Nation-state emphasizes the political unity while nation is a consciousness on account of psychological or spiritual feeling. There could be multiple nations in the same geographical and sovereign territory called country.

There are possibilities to explore Fourth World even in the first and third world. It is not a challenge against the third or the first world but a violence against an age old attitude ingrained in the society about the marginalized of the fourth world. It refers to the sub-population, socially excluded from global society; hunter-gatherers, nomadic, pastoral and some subsistence farming people who don't figure out in the main stream society. It coalesces/ amalgamates the exclusion of Romani people across the globe, the Sami, the Assyrians, Khurds in the Middle East, Pashtun throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan, the indigenous people of Armenians and

Asians, as well as Aboriginal Australians and the Papuans of New Guinea, Advasis and tribals of India.

Australian writer Adam Shoemaker provided a comprehensive account of Aboriginal literature in Australia with "Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature" in 1989. Upholding the same spirit Gordon Brotherston wrote "Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americas through Their Literature" argued that American continent was identified as the Fourth World of our Planet. Steven Conn in his "History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century" (2004) demonstrates that the exclusion of Native histories from human history has impressed the consciousness of societies and an imaginary of static people who exist 'with a past but without a history'.

The Fourth World is predicated by an articulation of hemispheric coherence and continuity that is corroborated politically and through a rigorous methodology that allows for the reading and understanding of indigenous sources. Fourth World Literature provides a space to share and articulate the rich cultural heritage of the original dwellers of the place who once existed in majority have reduced to minority & compelled to have marginal existence on account of their cultural annihilation. It can be analyzed and studied in the light of indigenous cultures with specific reference to their language & oral traditions.

Initially Adivasi was a contentious term to denote tribes as indigenous people of India. But nowadays it has gained immense popularity in the last few decades to identify the tribes. In Hindi the term 'Adivasi' means original settlers. The term is used not only for literary reasons but it has also political overtones. It has often been used to convey the position of the exclusion of the tribes & their subaltern status, to focus the tribal rights, their resistance, protests, assertions and movements. It must be stated that the Indian Constitution does not use the term 'Adivasi' rather it refers to the STs as Anusuchit Janajati. Traditionally 'Jana' was the more popular term to refer to the tribes in Hindi Heartland. Adivasis are mostly found in central India, north-eastern region. It is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic & tribal groups considered as the aboriginal population of India. Although terms such as atavita, vanavasi (forest dwellers) or girijan (hill people) are also used for the tribes of India. The Bhil tribe is regarded as the oldest of the aboriginal tribes. They are regarded as the original inhabitants of the forest of central India. The major tribal groups in India are Gonds, Santhals, Khasis, Angamis, Bhils, Bhutias, Great Andamanese etc.

In the Indian context, D.N. Majumdar defined a tribe as a social group with a territorial affiliation, endogamous without specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes but without caste stigma, following tribal

beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources; & above all, conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration. He has also popularized a term 'tribes in transition'. But there is a lack of consensus on the definition of a tribe because some of them are still at the primitive stage, some are under the process of development & still some others have substantially achieved a condition so that they are no different from the other groups of the society.

Marshall Sahlins has defined tribe as "a segmented organization. It is composed of a number of equivalent unspecialized multifamily groups, each the structural duplicate of the other: a tribe is a congregate of equal kin group blocs. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the Independent India provided the vision towards a policy for the downtrodden tribals. In his foreword to Elwin's book *A Philosophy for NEFA* in 1957, he writes:

1. People should be allowed to develop on the lines of their own genius and nothing should be imposed upon them.
2. Tribal rights on land and forest should be respected.
3. Induction of too many outsiders into the tribal areas should be avoided.
4. There should be no over-administration of tribal areas and work should be done through their own institution as far as possible

5. The result should be judged not by the amount of money spent but by the quality of

human character that is involved.

The above principles implied chiefly three goals: culture-specific and need- based development programmes for tribals, participation of people in both planning and implementation and finally their empowerment leading to self-identity and self-esteem.

In India the test of language has always been an important factor in the identification of tribes. There are fifteen officially recognized languages in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution of which four belong to the Dravidian family & the rest to the Indo- Aryan family. Besides these, there is an assortment of several hundred languages, usually not counted as literary language and spoken by smaller populations. Though in some cases it may comprise as many as a couple of million persons each. By and large, it is the communities associated with these languages that are recognized as tribes in India.

Tribes in India are the relatively isolated and backward communities of the country. Nevertheless, they have always been a part of the universe of Indian civilization, of Indian society and culture. Whether it is the description of the tribes in the Epics of

Sanskrit or in the Medieval Literature, the remotely situated people have always been treated as a part of the cultural & historical processes. Their isolation has always been relative and never absolute.

What is disturbing today is the magnitude of the problems facing up in tribal areas. There has been a rapid erosion of tribal rights on land, water & forest. There are various varieties of tribal movements are in vogue in contemporary scenario. There is a renewed demand for tribal autonomy and self – management of resources by communities. A large bloc of tribal communities are being urbanized, criminalized and pauperized. Inequalities are growing in otherwise relatively egalitarian tribal society.

In the name of development the national and international elites through the institution of state and the market have appropriated natural resources like land, minerals, forest & water. This impoverishment of nature is deprivation of communities who dependent on the natural base resources for their livelihood. This alienation can't be calculated in terms of the loss of material livelihood alone. In wider sense it is the loss of cultural autonomy, knowledge & power. The major source of land loss is large scale development projects. The land laws & different national amendments from time to time of land acquisition act make easy for the government as well as national & multinational companies to acquire land for these purposes.

The increased investment on mining based resources and industrial development has led to displacement of indigenous people on a large scale. The Draft National Policy for Rehabilitation of Persons displaced as a consequence of acquisition of land anticipated that the demand of land for the establishment of industry as well as for mineral resources are located in areas where predominantly inhabited by tribal people. Over the years, most tribal land has been either lost to non-tribal people or taken over by the government and classified as forest or revenue land. In the Scheduled Areas, three quarters of the land is state controlled, mostly forest. For tribals, land and land-based resources are the basis of their existence as communities and the rising demand for land from private companies has negative impacts. The entry of Direct Foreign Investment is accelerating the rate of land alienation.

The situation has deteriorated with liberalization. A sign of it is the opening statement of 1994 draft of the National Rehabilitation Policy, "it is expected that there will be large scale investments, both on account of internal generation of capital and increased inflow of foreign investments, thereby creating an enhanced demand for land to be provided within a shorter span in an increasingly competitive market ruled economic structure. The loss of land has significantly disrupted displaced peoples' livelihoods. The loss of land forest has pushed them into the class of wage labourer. The traditional self-dependent economy has

transformed into dependent monetized economy. Those who have land are also not able to live in that land due to so many reasons like pollution, less productivity etc.

The first coping mechanism followed by the government as well as the project is compensation. In most cases the norm used for compensation is based on market value. In Indian context, the market value differs from place to place & particularly for indigenous community, many of whom live in the backward regions where the price of land is too low. Consequently they compensate very low price. The second mechanism is employment opportunity in the project. The basic logic of ruling class is that more investment, more industrialization & more employment opportunity. But this logic proves myth so far the employment opportunity for the tribals is concerned.

Mahasweta Devi's novel *The Book of the Hunter* is all about the social documentation of the oral histories of tribal communities especially the Shabars tribes of India in general and Lodha Shabars of Medinipur & the Kheria Shabars Tribes of Purulia in West Bengal. She was an eminent writer and social activist, a crusader for the rights of tribals and the oppressed. Being blessed with the gift of the gab, she has blended oral histories with contemporary events to portray the sufferings of the tribals in the hands of upper caste landlords, money-lenders and government authorities. Aranyer Adhikar (The Occupation of the Forest), based on the Birsa Munda's

revolt against the British, Choti Munda & His Arrows, Titu, Breast Stories, Imaginary Maps are her literary outbursts.

Lodha peoples are the Primitive Tribal Group declared by the Government of India. They habitat primarily in West Bengal & Orissa. Lodha means piece of flesh named after their ancestor. It is the British who oppressed the tribals especially the Shabars ones who were traditionally dependent upon the forest for a living. They had revolted but were ruthlessly suppressed. Having been deprived of their livelihood and without any alternatives, they took to criminal ways of life & were subsequently declared by the British Government in 1871 as a 'criminal tribe', a stigma that continues to suppress the community even in contemporary times. After India achieved independence, this Act was repealed in 1952 and the tribes were "de-notified tribes (DNTs). The term has become popular, or better to say notorious. In present time, the tribes once known as 'criminal' are the ones who in greatest distress, whether they are the Sansis of Punjab and Delhi, the parhaiyas of Bihar or the Lodha Shabars and Kheria Shabars of West Bengal. In the process of suffering atrocities, cruelties and becoming uprooted; they have lost their oral traditions.

The Census of 1951 has references to the Lodhas as a tribe of hunters. So far as their historical reference is concerned, they take pride in claiming themselves as 'Savaras'. They believe Vishwavavasu, the mythical chief of Savaras spent time with

Lord Jagannath of Puri. The Census of India 1901 has reference to Lodhas where is described that the traditional occupation of the tribe is collection of jungle produce, such as, cocoons, lac, resin, honey, wax, etc. In the 21th century even after many decades, Lodhas are mostly referred to as criminal tribe. They suffer immense disadvantage in their day- to -day life on account of their ancestral baggage. The hostile treatment from mainstream society has resulted in nurturing the feeling of segregation, alienation and frustration in the community.

As the Lodhas bear the stigma of criminality, many people do not trust them wholly. And there were a good number of inter-tribe hostilities. Naturally a new mentality has to be grown to tackle this problem.... But such attempts to bring them to the fold of the bigger society still remain a far cry.... The results of the projects have not, however been as satisfactory as one desires.... They Have pseudo-friends in the form of receiver of stolen property who want to exploit them and keep the pot of criminality boiling.... Mass killing of the Lodhas took a different turn when their humble huts were set on fire....with nothing to fall back upon in life (Bhowmick, 1994 :53-54).

They are one of the Scheduled Tribes identified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). These groups may be characterized by their declining or stagnant population, low levels of literacy, pre- agricultural technology, primarily belonging to the hunting and gathering stage and extreme backwardness. They were considered as a special category for support for the first time in 1979. There are 75

PVTGs spread over the country with population of 25 lakh constituting nearly 3.6 % of the tribal population and 0.3% of the country's population. With declining sources of sustenance, they become more vulnerable to hunger/ starvation, malnutrition and ill health. Some of them are even on the verge of extinction.

In the preface of the novel, the novelist expresses her convictions and contentions: But more can be known about the Santhals Mundas or Oraons than about the smaller and more marginalized Shabar Tribes. She further writes: In this novel, I undertook for the first time to seek out the tribal identity of the Shabars. Whatever I have written about Byadh (hunter) or Shabar life, every detail will certainly be corroborated by the Shabars themselves --- the day they no longer driven from place to place, cruelly oppressed and insulted. Such is my goal, but I don't know whether I will accomplish it. This is, however a beginning. The encroachment of towns and non-advasis upon their territory, advasis are abandoning their lands and going away, then heartless destruction of forests, the search of the forest children for a forest home, the profound ignorance of main stream people about advasi society---these are all truths about our time.

The Book of the Hunter like her first novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is also on tribals which first published in Bengali & then got translated into English by Mandira & Sagaree Sengupta. The novel offers an effective conglomeration of fact,

fiction, folklore & history. Based on one of the sections of Mukundaram Chakrabarti's epic poem *Abhayamangal*, *Byadhakhanda*--- The Book of the Hunter—he describes the lives of hunter tribes, the Shabars, who lived in the forest and its environments. The Narrator Mukundaram records the lives of the Shabars as a spectator with specific reference to the lives of the tribal couple Kalya and Phuli. He records the life of shabars tribes in his *Mangalkavya* which is dedicated to gods and goddess who were not mentioned in the Puranas but worshiped by the people in their homes. The *Mangal kavyas* sang the glory of these gods and goddess. *Chandimangal* composed by Mukundaram Chakrabarti in the 16th century on Chandi (the forest and fertility goddess) has two parts: the first part is *Byadhkhanda*---The Book of the Hunter-where Chandi or Abhaya is the forest goddess. The second part is *Banik Khanda*, where Chandi gets recognition from seafaring merchants.

The novel explores the cultural values of the Shabars and how they cope with the slow erosion of their way of life as more & more forest land gets cleared to make way for settlements. It is through the comparison and contrast of the lives of two couples—the brahman Mukundaram and his wife & the young Sabars Kalya & Phuli the novelist tries to bring her ideas home. The Shabar origin is narrated to Brahmin Mukundaram by Shabar community head, Tejota, who possess / is the custodian of the secret knowledge of the tribe that has been passed on to her by her father Danko Shabar. From the narration which is in the oral tradition of storytelling, the readers

make themselves abreast with the history of Shabars, how their goddess abhyachandi, had blessed them with seven pots of everlasting riches & made them the rulers. But the children of nature that is the tribals are cheated by the so-called civilized denizens of society and consequently they are forced to live in poverty. Tejota narrated the story of Shabar's existence and their spread as well as about their deity Abhayachandi. In ancient time there used to be a virgin forest ... covered by her sari. The goddess was worshipped by them on a stone slab in the forest. The King of the town would like to build a temple to Abhaya & subsequently a Brahman youth stole the stone slab on which the goddess was worshipped. Consequently he along with his family members including animals meets with death. The goddess finally uttered that the Shabars have sinned as well because they trusted a Brahman. In time they will be scattered in all directions & be called by many names. But they will not grant respect to Brahmans or touch their feet in reverent greetings. They will suffer hardships if they ever place their trust in anyone other than the children of the forest. Millions of years have passed this way. Finally Ma observed that the now motherless Shabars were living in great misery. So, she took a rock and pressed it and the rock turned into a lump of clay. From this she created a man and a woman. She blew on them and they came to life. They later came to be known as Kalketu and Phullora. And finally they became king and queen of tribals and addressed as Meghbahan and Meghabati. Kalketu on the day of Durgashtami found a golden lizard as a prey for his hunting and the moment he

tried to grab it, it is Ma Abhayachandi who appeared and blessed him with seven pots of riches and blessed him with the gift of re-attainment of the lost glory of Shabars.

King Megha ruled for millions and millions of years and it is his treasurer who in order to know the secret of the riches drilled a pip hole and peered through it with his right eye and consequently the palace collapsed in an earthquake and the forest which had to be transmuted into city of Gujarat again turned into forest which covered the temple of Abhayachandia as well. Any Akhetiya who ever catches sight of the golden lizard on Durgashtami, he will be king.

Shabars tribes have their own customs and tradition which they strictly follow. In the shabar community, both men and women toiled for their daily victuals. They married whomever they wanted. They built separate huts after marriage. When the husband and wife quarreled, the husband thrashed the wife; she in turn, struck a blow or two. And it could even come to pass that they would leave each other. Then both the man and woman could remarry (p. 97).

There were plenty of rules and customs for the wedding itself. The bidhishal, or canopy for the marriage rites, was so grand! Mothers, sisters and sisters-in-law twirled an arrowhead in the pond and brought back auspicious water. The girls went out with arrows and brought home whatever they had killed, birds, hares or

porcupines. On the eve of the wedding, all the girls walked around a mahua tree seven times and every boy married a mango tree. Why this 'tree wedding'? So you could become givers of life, shelter and nourishment like the trees. So you could be victorious over death, like a tree. A tree creates new trees through its seeds, and lives on through them. The same way, you lived on through your progeny (p.131).

No Shabar could enter the boundaries of Abhaya's fortress with an intent to kill. Abhayachandi's forest was governed by Abhaya's unwritten laws. She had granted the Shabars the means to earn their living by hunting, and she had given them the laws and rules of hunting as well.

The novel also highlights how Shabars are not particular about money nor do they have enough of them. In fact, they never realized that they were poor. They are content and happy with whatever they received from Mother Nature. The Shabar men roam " ...around, bamboo staff, axe or spear in hand, killing birds & animals for a living while the Shabar women go to market to sell meat, feathers, skins, wood, honey, incense, fruits, roots and bark. They buy nothing except for rice, cloth, salt, peeper & oil. They confined themselves to their own lives.

Shabars always maintained a close kinship with forest, their environment. They are forever well guarded by their deity, Abhyachandi, who caters to all their needs.

They are fully aware of the fact that "A Shabar is where the jungle is". They strictly follow the rule of jungle. They have a great regard for their women. They never receive dowry in their marriages. Instead they pay "streedhan" in the form of deer, elephant hides, tiger skins, tiger claws, elephant tusks & other which is sold by bride's father to purchase commodities that is needed for a community feast. Women are allowed to remarry on the death of their husband or their desertion.

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