

Exploring the Unexplored: An Overview of Regional Indian Novels from Bengali, Oriya, Marathi and Jharkhandi Literature-Reflecting True Essence of Subaltern Community in India

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the regional literary voices that emerge in various parts of India. A common theme that stands out is that native voices are stronger than mainstream voices in Indian literature. When we study this vast body of Adivasi literature in regional languages with the treatment of all the theories of literature including Colonialism, Postcolonialism, deconstruction, metanarrative, Marxism, Neocolonisation and Postglobalization but on the other hand mainstream Indian English fiction writing does not show such a vast maturity of 'ism' and its literary presentation through their novels. Indian English fiction writers find it with ease when they use the word 'Subaltern'. However, they never think from this perspective, nor have they presented the community of Indians from a subaltern point of view. However, the most striking and surprising reality is that the Adivasi-Aboriginal are the most wretched souls, the most destroyed cultures in contemporary independent India.

Keywords: Bhasha literature; Deconstruction; Displacement; Disorientation; Marginalization

FULL PAPER

Introduction

Postcolonial Indian English novels have given a voice to suppressed sections of society. The above-mentioned novel addresses poverty, hunger, famine, exploitation, colonialism, and neocolonialism, but it hardly gives voice to these issues in its narrative. On the other hand, C. K. Janu, an activist, is well known for her fight for their land and forest. It appears that our Indian English fiction writers do not take the issue seriously. Indian English fiction writing may seem distant from reality, but regional novel writing is persuasive in its pathos. Disorientation of Adivasis, marginalisation of Adivasis has been depicted authentically by Raja Shekhar Pateti in his volume, *Exploring Fourth World Literature*, when he writes:

The struggle for land spearheaded by C. K. Janu was not merely a struggle for land by the landless. In fact, it was the resistance against dispossession. The Adivasis were trying to reclaim land on which they have existed over the millennia. The law passed during the colonial period and subsequently affected a kind of erasure of their existence and declared the land on which they live as 'forest' out by giving that nomenclature appropriated it for a specific purpose and excluded them from it. (Patteti: 1998:279)

Another regional novel, *Kocharethi*, deals with the dispossession of the people from their land. The exploited machinery of landlords has shown its ugly reality through this novel. This novel is another example that demonstrates a deeper understanding of life than mainstream Indian English fiction writers. In the introduction of this novel, Catherine Thankamna opines:

The novel maps the Adivasis changing perceptions of land and its ownership. Its account that traces the possession and disposition of land, the innocence at a people who did not even have a notion that land was property and that they could be alienated from it. To the Adivasis, the first inhabitants, there was no question of acquiring individual rights over the land. The land was not separable from their sense of collective identity they were one with it and celebrated this union on all rites of passage. (Narayan: 2011: Blurb)

Disposition and land grabbing of Adivasis are not modern issues; this is a process which has been running down from the period of colonialism. The landlords were the wretched people who used to grab the land with or without their permission. By taking advantage of illiteracy or by taking advantage of their helplessness, they were used to grab the land. Gopinath Mohanty, another novelist

from Odisha, has presented a striking picture of the displaced Adivasis in his most celebrated novel, *Paraja*. Novels sympathetically portray the ethos, customs, and struggles for survival. Mohanty's other novel, *Ancestor*, also explores ancestry. Many beliefs, traditions, and customs, with their profound significance, have been preserved in this novel. Regarding the theme of the novel, Bikram Das opines:

The novel *Paraja* is much more than sociological or anthropological documentation. Sukru Jani is not merely the primitive tribesman ensnared by the predictor money lender from the city he is also quintessential man, waging heroic but futile war against holistic universe. The choice of the canvass, whether by accident or design, becomes singularly appropriate to Mohanty's theme; the primeval consciousness of his protagonists reflects perfectly the situation of the archetypal human being their stark joys and interwoven anguish embody the complexity of the human condition. (Mohanty: 1997:06)

Mahasweta Devi was a legend in regional literature. In a true sense, she had taken the responsibility to give a voice to the marginalised who had been suppressed for centuries. Her translated novel, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, was a pathbreaking work in the field of regional translation. For the first time, Birsa Munda, the legendary martyr and icon of all Adivasis in India, was known through her magnificent novel. During the colonial rule, the territory was interrupted by the Britishers' tax policies and the oppressive treatment of the landlords. The present novel shows the realism of the struggle. Britons have implemented their various economic policies on the forest with the help of local landlords. The novel is a prime example of the struggle of the s against oppressive moneylenders and colonisers. They were in continuous fighting with local landlords and the mighty British Empire, right from the colonisation of India. Hundreds of revolts took place in colonial India, but hardly any of those revolts became the subjects of literary, social and political discourses in India. Mainstream Indian elite society and Indian English working classes never tried to introduce that warfare to the world. Mahasweta Devi wrote this novel, which was the 'manifesto' of the tradition of revolts. This is the story of Munda archer Chotti, a symbol of the resistance of his ancestors. Regarding the theme of this novel, we remind you of Gayatri Spivak's statement about the subaltern study. In Mahasweta Devi's translated work, *Imaginary Maps*, she criticises the mainstream literary canon for its neglect of exploitation. Pterodactyl wants to show what it has been doing not just in the entire world, but also in India. We did not try to know it. Each tribe is like a continent. However, we never tried to know them. Never tried to

respect them. This is true of every. And we destroyed them.” (Mahasweta Devi: 1995: 56).

The novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is suggestive on various accounts. Her arrows are the symbol of their society, the culture that an outsider threatens. It is a symbol of their ancestral faith, pride, and honour. This novel illustrates the ongoing movement of land, forest, and water. The leadership of Chotti, who is the eyewitness and observer of the suffering of decolonisation from the perspective of the aboriginal tribes. Her struggle was against those who came and tried to rob their culture and erase their identity. The novel is an excellent example of the double colonisation of internal colonisation of Adivasis in India. Wants to free themselves from colonial rule, but at the same time they wanted to be free from internal colonisation of dikus and landlords:

The August movement did not even touch the life of Chotti’s community. It was as if that was the Diku’s struggle for liberation. Dikus never thought of the Adivasis as an Indian. They did not draw them into the liberation struggle. In war and independence, the life Chotti and his cohorts remained unchanged. They stand at a distance and watch it all. (Devi: 2003: 122)

Chotti Munda and His Arrow present a unique perspective on life. Bonded labour was the most threatening problem for the state from independence. The double treachery of landlords, politicians, and the government is satirised by the critic G.A. Ghanshyam in his critical responses, "The Voices of the Other: Post-Independence Indian English Fiction." He explores:

There was a change from all around. Some of which they saw in the form of industrialization which benefited only the dikus. There was no difference or change in the way others treated the Adivasi people, nor was there any improvement in their ways of living. They could not understand the double-dealing of the Indian administrator who gave them freedom from bonded labor on paper, yet would not let them be free. (Ghanshyam: 2013:122)

Mahasweta Devi’s another comprehensive and realistic novel, *Arenyer Adhikar* (1977), portrays the icon Birsa Munda and his *Ulgulan* movement for the emancipation of the territory as its central theme. *Ulgulan* was a simultaneous revolt against social, economic, and political exploitation by British power and local landlords. An ancient Munda narrates the novel to tell the story of the movement of revolt to the young Munda. Anand Mahanand has commented on Mahasweta Devi’s narration power in the following words:

Mahasweta Devi exposes the exploitation of and its mental and physical effects on. She shows crookedness, exploitativeness and callousness of the British Government and the ruthless nature of non-aboriginal landlords and petty officials. She does not present a romantic or exaggerated picture, but the poverty-stricken and insecure life of people for whom rice remained an external dream. (Mahanand: 2011:170)

The character of Birsa Munda is inspiring in the novel, which raised awareness among others about the exploited machinery of the British Government. He is the commander of the revolt. To win the faith of his people, he calls himself God, but in reality, he knows the solution to problems is not in religious dogmas; still, to create enthusiasm in others, he calls himself 'Bhagwan'. The regional novel is rich in literary representations of the Munda Revolt, Koal Revolt, Santhal Hul, and Sardari Revolt, as well as numerous regional novels written by local authors in Hindi. Writing for rights is akin to a legacy, a dignity of the regional writer. However, postcolonial Indian English writers, particularly Indian English novelists, have neglected their past and sought refuge in romanticisation. They could not create a larger life of culture and revolts through English literature. In this regard, Anand Mahanand points out:

Unlike writers who were stimulated by exotica and choose to romanticize idealized societies, Mahashweta Devi does not present a romanticized picture of. Instead, she portrays the poverty-stricken and insecure lives of the people for whom rice remained an external dream, where life meant wandering from one village to another due to ceaseless eviction by 'dikus' for whom land reclaimed the forest was the basis of life. (Mahanand: 2011: 171)

Indian English novelists have shown bare-footed characters in their novels who are native sons of the soil. Through their broad literary canvass, the mainstream has demeaned the suffering, where Billy Biswas looks to life as free from all worldly activities, Bilasia, the girl, as a goddess, and the old Dhunia as a more mature chief of the village. He praises everything about life in the novel, but the drought-like situation, the problem of hunger and the miserable situation come to light through the local chief Dhunia. Marginalisation is not a new phenomenon, nor is it a new concept in literature. S. N. Choudhary has made a serious comment in the introduction of the book *Social Movement in India*, where he opines,

"Thousands of tribes have been displaced from their native place without any proper rehabilitation. It is neither just humanistic from a point of view. Due to the absence of a voice against displacement and silence on various issues,

including exploitation, industrial houses prefer to install their project in areas” (Choudhary: 2010:05).

The colonisation of India has a history of four hundred years, but the political, social, and economic marginalisation of India is older than that. Thousands of Indian English novels on the theme of post-independent India, postcolonial India, and Global India, as depicted in the novels of Arvind Adiga, Palash Maharotra, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, and Shashi Tharoor, have been published on the middle-class life of India. However, several marginalised groups could not become part of their literary sensibility. It seems strange that a writer who had worldly knowledge about imperial exploitation and its crushing power over marginal cultures seems unaware of victimisation, exploitation, corporate looting and hardcore marginalisation. While writing about the colonial impact on the Indian psyche, novels must take culture, subjugation and deprivation into consideration. In this regard, Virginia Xaxa comments in *State, Society and Tribes*:

The reclamation of the forest for land cultivation, expansion of roads and railways, exploitation of minerals resources form of a key economic activity during the colonial period. Needless to say, these policies led to the large ‘scale destruction of natural resources and yet the problems and hardships suffered by the were not felt acutely unit the post-independence period. Either the exact impact of the policy was not realized or the policy, despite expropriating the rights of the people gives some freeway to them. By employing such processes, thousands of square kilometers of land were brought under the forest department. (Xaxa: 2008:108)

In this chapter, we studied the regional tribal–Adivasi discourse from various parts of India. We can claim that, compared to mainstream Indian English fiction, novel writing from Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, and Hindi is much focused on the tribal issue of identity crises and subjugation. Nobody can deny that the tribal community's existence is not a part of romanticisation and overglorification; it should be studied and presented based on a grounded reality, as found in regional tribal literature. Tribes are going through the process of silent killing and marching towards the unnoticed genocide process. Then, what are the solutions to end such exploitative policies?

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