



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



---

ISSN 2278-9529  
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## Mahasweta Devi's Tribals the Sons of Soil in *The Book of the Hunter*

**Dr. Ruchika Chauhan**

Sr. Lecturer,  
Govt. Polytechnic for Women,  
Kandaghat, Solan.  
Himachal Pradesh.

Mahasweta Devi invests her writings with authenticity by her sustained contact with the tribals to such an extent that her flat in Calcutta remains open for tribal guests and friends for twenty four by seven. Birsa Munda's portrayal in *Aranyer Adhikar* is her first major statement on the tribal cause published in 1977. Her visits to tribal areas started in 1965 and since then she has been writing of her experiences in the tribal areas of Bihar and West Bengal. She has been instrumental in creating Palamau Bandhu Mukti Morcha in 1981 and the Lodha Shabar Kalyan Samiti in 1982 and the Kheria Shabar Kalayan Samiti in 1983 to initiate development and economic self sufficiency among some of the most deprived and isolated tribal groups in the districts of Mednipur and Purulia. Her works open the gaps and lacunae of administrative machinery working against the tribal development. It is Devi's forte to rewrite tribal history from a realistic dimension to present a larger pattern of exploitation.

The Shabars are hunting tribes who take utmost care to protect and save forest and wildlife, and believe that every creation in nature has a right to live. They are not individualistic or self-centred, they do not think of making profit and believe in 'Vasudev Kutumbakum' with enough space for every creation of nature. They are peace-loving and have rich knowledge of medicinal plants. With modest living and minimum needs, they are simple and straightforward in their thought process, and respect ecological democracy without knowing the terms and concepts used by the so called educated people. The non-tribals have a lot in store to learn from the tribals like ecological principles and conservation of forest and bio-diversity.

Mahasweta Devi's first novella, *The Book of the Hunter*, published in Bengal as *Byadhakhanda*, mirrors the powerful oeuvre of literary activist enjoying readership beyond Bengal. Here is a rich interweaving of several trends from fiction, fact, folklore and history, enriched by her experiences of working with the tribals. In an article, "Mahasweta Devi: An Intimate View," Pankaj K. Singh underlines her commitment, "I was drawn towards the so-called criminal tribes and was greatly shocked to realise that nobody ever felt concerned about them who have suffered the most brutal oppression. I cannot tolerate it. Wherever I might have begun from, I have arrived at the right destination. This is my biggest challenge.... I have no faith in any gods or goddesses. I do not bow down before anyone from inside. Of course, I pay respect to those who deserve it. There is a belief that each human being is born for some purpose. If I were to subscribe to this view then about my own self, I reckon that I am born to do what I am doing for these so-called criminal tribes. It is not my aspiration that I should be considered as a great writer, win many awards and there is a big noise

about it. (Pointing towards her heart) Nothing reaches here. But an ordinary member of a denotified tribe can take me anywhere. Only his cause can touch my heart, nothing else” (1). An important fact about her is that she has not only fought the forces of darkness and exploitation but has sensitized the exploited and suppressed for their human rights.

*The Book of the Hunter* is a part of nationalist tradition of historiography. In contemporary times, folk traditions have a seminal role in articulating contemporary concerns of culture and tradition. Her aim in writing this novel is re-historicization of the Shabar tribe. Working as an activist with Lodha and Kharia Shabars of Central India made her recreate the lost oral lore of the Shabars and thereby restore their self respect. Presently the Shabars are one of the most primitive tribes found in the districts of Hazaribagh, Ranchi and Singhbhum. The Criminal Tribes Act was passed in 1871 during the colonial rule and the Lodhas were branded as criminals, a stigma that is still attached to them, especially to those in Medinipur. The notable example of this stigma is the story of Chuni Kotal, the first woman graduate from the Lodha Shabars, who after graduating in 1985 was harassed and discriminated against for several years, ended with her tragic suicide in 1992. It was her tragic death that became instrumental in uniting the dispossessed tribals.

In the preface to the novel, Mahasweta Devi declares, “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) are Shabar life, every detail will certainly be corroborated by the Shabars themselves - the day they are no longer driven from place to place, cruelly oppressed, and insulted ... Such is my goal, but I do not know whether I will accomplish it... This is, however, a beginning. The encroachment of towns and non-advasis upon their territory, advasis abandoning their lands and going away, the heartless destruction of forests, the search of the forest children for a forest home, and the profound ignorance of mainstream people about advasi society - these are all truths of our own time” (viii).

The novella is based on her personal experiences with the Shabars and the stories that they have published about themselves in her journal, *Bortika*. As per the preface of *The Book of the Hunter*, Mahasweta Devi was inspired by Mukundaram’s epic poem, *Abhyamangal*, wherein he portrays the life of nomadic forest dwelling tribes, the Shabars. In the epic, the goddess gives Kalketu a boon that makes him the founder and chieftain of the city of Gujarat; it is bestowed upon him not because of his devotion to her and to the forest creatures but rather to put a break on wanton destruction of forest dwelling animals. Kalketu becomes the first priest of a new goddess cult and founder of the priestly clan of the Shabars. Here she describes the clash between contrasting forms of life through the experiences of two couples, the migrant Brahmin priest Mukundaram and his wife, and Kalya and Phuli - a young Shabar couple. Brahmin Mukundaram is seen using his experiences with the forest dwelling couple to depict the characters of Kalketu and Phullara, both re-incarnations of demi-gods who were cursed to suffer mortal birth. He invokes the Goddess of the great forest (Abhya or Reassurance) through the voice of the hunter Kalketu. They are under the benevolent care of their deity, Abhayachandi,

who “gives them *abhya* or reassurance against all fears; she kept all her wild creatures, trees, and forest children - the Shabars safe in her lap” (68). Devi dwells on the authority of the myths published by Shabar activist in *Bortika* to validate her version of Kalketu story rather than on the stories orally narrated. In fact, she stresses that the stigma or the label of “criminal tribe” imposed on the Shabars in colonial times led them to cultural amnesia and they forgot their oral lore. “To re-historicise the Shabars is interesting, though somewhat paradoxical, similarly, when she refers to Kabikankan Mukundaram’s firsthand knowledge of the Shabar and the forest, it is at the moment when the forest and the Shabars’ distinctive way of life is about to be destroyed. Thus, she refers to the names of trees mentioned in the Chandi Mangala that are felled when Kalketu clears the forest to make his settlement” (Chatterjee 76).

The story of Shabars and their traditions is closely interwoven with the forest in which they live and roam. The Shabars are the birds of the forest for whom to work from dawn to dusk is a means to be in bliss. For them it is futile to worry, for they do not suffer from thinking disease. They live in present and enjoy every moment despite their share of troubles round the year. They simply enjoy marriage of *sal* tree to the *mohul* tree in the month of Phalgun, and are happy singing and dancing the whole night. They are content living in the bosom of forest and there are no signs of sufferings on their faces. They never say we need this, we are without that, instead they say we have got this, we have got that. There is no end to misery which is largely due to their inability to farm and produce rice for themselves. They do not realize that they are poor and enjoy toiling hard by selling meat, feathers, skins, wood, honey, incense, fruits, kul roots and bark. They buy nothing except rice, cloth, salt, pepper and oil. They are always happy with so many festivals where both men and women dance and play on little drums.

The mainstream people have encroached upon the adivasi territory with the result that the adivasis have to abandon their land. It tells of the forbidden mysterious abode of the goddess, Abhaya, of the gift of hunting that she bestowed upon them, the laws that she laid down, and the consequences of breaking these laws, and of the simple, natural way of life of these “forest children.” The “mainstream” settlements have pushed the Shabars further and further into the forests, encroaching not only upon the hunting lands and homes of the tribals, but also disrupting the delicate equilibrium of nature itself. With the advancement of boundaries, especially city walls, a lot of earth was dug for making burnt bricks leading to creation of a large cistern. These walls could not be materialized as herds of elephants kept tearing them down and Bemo Shabar, the head of the community suggested to the king to make mud walls and save mother earth from the furnace of burning bricks. The Shabars’ sole aim and effort is the protection of their natural habitat but the city and its ways are strange. A simpleton Phuli is cheated by the city people of her meagre profit, that is, instead of paying one hundred and one cowries promised to her, she is paid half the price.

With the advancement of township near tribal settlement, the tribals are corrupted by the demon of money. Earlier they had no materialistic sense, their life was limited to rice only but now they too have become practical and manipulative. The husband of Phuli’s friend sells acacia

berries, *ritha* fruits, amla and ripe *hartuki* to the goldsmith, and comes back with his waistband full of money to buy rice, salt, and cloth, however, Kalya remains untouched by this vogue of consumerist culture.

The system of marriage which largely rests on love is now being under the spurt of money and show off, however the headman, old Danko, tries to restrict this misuse of money in the form of bride-price limiting it only to five deer skins and two wild boars at the time of marriage. Elephant skin is used at the time of ritual when bride and groom hold each other's face followed by a community feast. In earlier times they never sold tiger or deer skins in exchange for money but now they trade it in place of rice and oil which are needed in plenty for wedding celebration with drumming of dhol and madhol as singing and dancing continues for a whole month. Throughout the year they are busy in religious festivities with rites and rituals. Phuli sells her raisin and honey for a high price which is five thick coins of iron and copper, and for her it is equivalent to the wealth of seven kings.

The Shabars lead uncomplicated lives, it is not difficult for them to leave their dwellings and move on to another home, but how many times, and where will they go when there are fewer and fewer forests? "The forests keep receding and the cities keep coming forward," says the tribal chief Danko Shabar sadly, and tries to mobilise his people to withstand these pressures. By relentless felling, burning and clearing, the villages and townships have erased more and more forests from the earth. *The Book of the Hunter* offers a powerful plea for the preservation of forests. Life for the Shabars since centuries, when Mukundaram wrote about his restless search for Abhaya's forest, a forest that would remain pristine and unravaged by human settlements, is still the same. Ma Abhyachandi is omnipotent as she hears silent prayers and shelters the mothers, sisters and wives of Akhetiyas. She protects men who go to forests where death lurks in every nook and corner, and women have a faith that if they tie up a strand of their hair in a knot, their men will be safely back.

*The Book of the Hunter*, enriched by Devi's lifetime experiences, is an important step to sensitize mainstream culture about the people of the forests, and perhaps, ultimately, the forests themselves. For the Shabars, sweets taste like poison, they can eat sour and they like to eat hot but no sweets. They like *amani* flavoured with tamarind leaves, salt and pepper. Rice was something not destined for everybody, it was Ma Abhya's wish to make no stock of rice at home for the Shabars. Likewise, their accessories include necklace made of twisted red, black and yellow threads, and earrings made of palm shoots. Mahasweta Devi explores the cultural values of the Shabars and how they make an effort to cope up with the slow erosion of their way of life as more and more forest land is cleared to make way for settlements. The hunter tribes' refusal to cultivate and settle down is emblematic of surviving forest tribes even today.

The story is placed in Ararha village where people are united like a family with their leader Danko who hands over his knowledge to his daughter, Tejota, and leaves the village to live in the forest so as to guard Abhayachandi's temple. The Shabar people respect both Danko and his daughter, the old Tejota. The story moves round the love affair and marriage of Tejota's

son, Kalya, and his beloved Phuli. There are several other young couples who move about carelessly in the whole community putting hands on each other's waist but nobody dares to break the laws given by their goddess. "These people didn't even know the meaning of the word 'shame.' They are forest progeny! Mukunda had once seen a wild vine wrapped around a sal tree. Neither the tree nor the vine knew shame, nor did these two" (116). Phuli holds Kalya's hand in public and calls him *tui* which is a shameful act to Mukunda's wife but to tribals it is a part of their custom. As opposed to the universal you in English, Bengalis make a distinction between *tui*, *tumi*, and *apni*, the three forms for you in hierarchic gradations of respect and familiarity. *Tui* is used for someone younger in age or someone very close, it is a term of endearment. *Apni* is used to address someone older or someone with whom one is formal. *Tumi* is used to address people of the same age group or older people with whom one is familiar. In spite of their open demeanour they are much more civilized and sophisticated than the so-called civilized ones.

Many events in the novel focus on Abhya culture and Abhayachandi Goddess, they do everything as per their culture and it is to be noticed that their culture is far more intellectual than the culture of the city people or the elite people. The Shabars have immense reverence for nature, they are governed by laws of Abhya Chandi, and they cannot kill an animal out of free will, only with Ma's wish they can do so. There are rules and right ways of hunting, if they do not follow, "A curse would descend on the lives of the Shabars. No Shabar could enter the boundaries of Abhya's fortress with intent to kill. Abhyachandi forest was governed by Abhya'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" (137). Danko cautions Kalya and reminds him of their hunting laws when they go out to hunt the huge old tusker but Kalya goes against the hunting laws and is killed by the elephant. The Shabars solely rely on hunting and whatever mother Earth provides them with, "Whatever comes out of jungle, they'll eat it scalded or roasted. They won't work on any schedule, they won't farm, and they will retort, why plough when there is a forest?" (65).

The Shabars have a belief that if one plants *sheora* and *chalkuto* vine in his yard, it is sure to bring ruin. Also, one should never steal the eggs of *Latuk* bird from their nests, and never kill any bird with a sling shot. Adivasi economy is often perceived as extremely primitive and backward but in reality in the name of development projects there has been a cultural genocide in the tribal areas. The younger generation is deeply influenced by non-tribal world, and the influence of city is pernicious on them. The young tribal girls like Phuli, Sona and Korhi do not want to learn midwifery due to outside influence. Tejota is really frightened with the advancing town as with it the evil spirits of *Trikal* tries to harm the community. It is burdensome responsibility to weed out the evil, to heal burns and wounds, to collect medicinal herbs and to do the puja.

*The Book of the Hunter* documents the oral history of the tribal communities before they disappear altogether. Through Shabars an attempt has been made to portray the condition of the

tribal race whose existence is threatened as more and more city people go on recklessly cutting the forests and encroaching upon the tribal world. The traders have no respect for tribal laws and they just want a thriving business. Deer hunting is forbidden but they disregard this fact and make the tribals flout their norms of hunting too. Although young Kalya puts a strong foot and turns the traders back. The Shabars originally were content with roots and tubers only but now with outside contact they want rice everyday and when they cannot get it they lose their temper. Their customs and rituals are ancient and they follow it as a matter of faith as they worship Kalpeshwar or Shiva once a year, the consort of their goddess Abhyachandi. However, they never visit the forbidden temple of Abhyachandi in the thick of forest as a matter of faith.

Another important aspect of their culture is their social codes where a woman's place is of honour, widows can remarry, and divorce is allowed. They have their customs of marrying, remarrying or choosing a mate, “when husband and wife leave each other, they can both remarry. A widow could remarry her late husband's younger brother, or any other man. That was what Abhaya laid down. Give them full liberty and they will honour it absolutely” (120). They strictly adhere to the rules regarding nature, they do not kill any animal in the season of mating, however, gradually the settlements from the city brought many changes in their life and this brought ill-fortune to their society as well. Ultimately to save them from this encroachment they all moved to another forest. Whether knowingly or unknowingly or out of superstition, the religious rituals they perform do not harm the ecological balance. They maintain balance by killing animals but not beyond a limit. For instance, Danko announces limited killing of animals on the occasion of marriage. If every girl's father demanded, “Bring me this, bring me that,” the forest would be exhausted, “They're all Abhaya's creatures – do you want to kill them all in your desperate greed?” (113) he further says, “So, now I'm going to make a rule that only five deer skins may be taken. And one or two wild boars - no one will ever give more than that. You've got a daughter's wedding and she's under Abhaya's protection – what's the point of inviting Ma's curse by killing too many deer, tigers or boars?” (66). For killing, the norms are fixed, the biggest sin lies in killing a pregnant deer or any other animal in their season of mating, that's why when the king of Dhalbhum wanted hundred skins of male deer for some ceremony and his traders came with a contract to pay a rupee coin of pure silver for each skin of male deer, Kalya drove the traders away as it was “the time for the deer to mate. Any Shabar who kills a deer during this period would have Abhaya's curse upon him” (81). This is the only reason why Danko did not transfer knowledge to his own son-in-law, Megha, who had lost his right to become the chief due to his offence.

Unlike city dwellers the Shabars do not crave for a luxurious life. They are innocent tribal people living in close vicinity of nature; they just enjoy their life by eating, drinking and merry making. Phuli and Kalya are untouched by the evil emotions like pride, jealousy, envy, etc., they are happy enough with a cloth to cover their body, rice to quench their hunger and a mate to pour their emotions on. “They don't know what money is, nor do they see much of it” (102). Kalachanda says, “They don't even know they are poor ... they are always happy. They have so many festivals and holidays - both men and women dance and play on little drums. They mind

their own business and are perfectly content. The men and women both toil hard ... they have a fine life” (49). Thus these tribal people always suffer from a muted identity and that’s why in the beginning of the novel there is the reassurance of Abhaya against all fears but gradually they learnt that “a town had sprung up outside the forest, and that a king had established his capital there” (58). The establishment of town in it was like tormenting mother earth with the heat. A Shabar can never trust a Brahmin because it was a Brahmin youth who had stolen the idol of Abhyachandi, and that was “the beginning of bad times for the Shabars. You cannot trust Brahmins” (110).

Wearing a brass or bronze ornament was not considered a good thing as nature is the only adornment for man. Among different customs there is the custom of bride- price but the Shabars are quite rational in the sense that they would not let this custom be a source of greed or exploitation because they realise that there is no end to human greed. There are number of customs for the wedding itself with symbolic significance:

The *bidhishal*, or canopy for the marriage rites, was so grand! Mothers, sisters and sister-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 ... On the eve of the wedding, all the girls walked around a mahua 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 after death, like a tree. A tree creates new trees through its seeds, and lives on through them. The same way, you live on through your progeny. (131)

This clearly indicates the extent of love and reverence the Shabars have for the forests, it is simply unparalleled approach with regard to forest protection acts in the present context. The Shabars follow discipline in their economic activities, only thrice a year they sell deer skins, tiger skins, honey and fragrant raisins. Their life style is simple, without farming they make their huts out of vines and leaves, their permanent treasure is their shovels, axes, bows and arrows. After marriage, the newlyweds live in a separate hut which is a kind of providing space in relationships, especially, to the newlyweds which is symbolic of their broad thinking and mutual respect. After childbirth there is a custom of Dikbandhan ceremony which is a purification ritual after the birth of child, symbolic of cleanliness and independent learning and growth of parenthood. The new hut erected for child delivery is demolished and routine life follows.

Due to rampant urbanization the pristine environment of the forest is adversely affected. One effort in this direction can be afforestation as reflected by Danko Shabar who is associated with the cultivation of medicinal herbs. He cares for the forests and its resources and has faith in the tribal beliefs and dreams of longevity through medicinal herbs alongwith birth of many children to continue the Shabar lineage. His main concern is with the forests and an increase in the generation of Shabars, he can very well see that the forests in which the Shabars live happily and majestically are vanishing fast. The Shabars and the forests are indivisible as they enjoy a close bond with nature, in fact, they maintain a close kinship with forest and their environment.

They feel blessed in the bosom of mother earth who caters to all their needs. Talking about the greatness of their deity, Kalya tells the Brahmin, “And to everyone and everything! The forest, the animals, the birds, and the Shabars - she gives them all courage and keeps them under her wing” (44). In other words forest is their mother and a mother and a child cannot be separated. They are fully aware of the fact that “A Shabar is where the jungle is” (86).

Tejota, the head of Shabar community, narrates the Shabar myth to the Brahmin Mukundaram. This brings to light the past of Shabars, how their goddesses had blessed them with seven pots of everlasting riches and how they were cheated by the so-called civilized people and as a result are forced to live in poverty until a Shabar succeeds in killing a golden lizard to regain their lost glory. In the preface to the novel, the author states that Lord Jagannath was originally a Lodha god, and that Brahmins are unworthy of Lodha’s obeisance because a Brahmin stole the deity’s image from them. The myth is historically corroborated as Devi says, “One could say in support of this that till date a Shabar first performs the worship service at the Jagannath temple in Puri. And it is evident that the Lodha Shabars enjoyed a high status in society those days, on Kanisar hill the Lodha priest used to sit above and the brahman priest below, till 1982. Also, the puja at the Guptamani Temple on Bombay road is entrusted to a lineage of Lodha priests. Once upon a time the Lodhas in those forested areas were quite respected” (ix). In this novella, the story of the Brahmin Mukundaram has been juxtaposed with that of the tribals.

The civilized people continue to engage themselves in the depletion of natural resources, they hardly realize that deforestation is one of the greatest threats to environment and that it robs the Shabars of their natural habitat. But the children of the forest are sensitive to changes, they sense that the forest is receding and that the town of Ararha is coming up and they have to go in search of some virgin forest. It does not stop here, even their simple way of living is influenced by the city-dwellers. Phuli who wears natural accessories of palm flower earrings and wooden bangles seems to be craving for brass anklets once she mingles with the women of the town. Kalya instantaneously warns her, “No. An akhetiya’s wife never wears brass or bronze. Doesn’t Ma warn us to stay away from metal things?” (96). The influence of the town dwellers does not stop with Phuli alone, the overwhelming influence of town has entered the houses, the yards, and the ways of living of the younger generation. Sana’s family has learned to save as this year their roof is not made of leaves but of hay. It is quite an event to see Shabars suddenly smoothing mud over their house walls and painting pictures on them. Sana’s husband does not thrash her, and Sana oils her hair, and has rice in her store.

There is no stopping the times from changing! A Shabar understood that the more others encroached, the more his existence would be threatened. Then, that was it. He’d pick up camp, sticks and all, and calling ‘Ma, Ma!’ go off into the shelter of some virgin forest. (106)

The honest intention and effort should be made to rehabilitate the Lodhas in a dignified manner. The greater society more or less failed to rationalize the changed image of the tribe and continued

to suspect them for their past activities. It proves the saying that a “lost good name is never retrieved,” furthermore, the non-Lodha communities become jealous of them for the care and assistance they receive from ongoing schemes. In this rehabilitation process of the Lodhas, P. K. Bhowmick, an anthropologist, played a significant role. He rightly considered that their criminality had been due to the disintegration of their social moorings and their economic and territorial displacements from time to time. The intention of all these efforts is to provide them a stable economic background as well as to introduce cultivation among them to bring them at par with other progressive communities of the region.

Over five decades a huge amount has been spent in the name of the Lodhas but the community is still inflicted with low literacy, instability, and a life of acute poverty. Thus it is evident that a tribe rooted to a life style and culture built around forest gets disrhythmed and distorted when they are evicted from their natural habitat. The problem is compounded when the greater society fails to dispel the prejudice against the community in an atmosphere of disbelief. Resorting back to the past cultural setting also meets with a setback because of the rupture created in the meanwhile. It comes to the fore that the displacement of the forest people from their ecology for earning greater revenue or to privilege the affluent and mighty at the cost of the poor tribals ultimately marginalizes them. It is a welcome development that in recent years the government is trying to provide and restore their original environment through reforestation programmes in some selected areas but there are very few who enjoy these benefits because it becomes irrelevant to them after the rupture in their life style. Seeking protection from discrimination, and by affirmative action, indigenous people will also prove constructive as it will allow them to enjoy a certain degree of respect.

Another important aspect of Shabar culture is their social codes where a woman's place is of honour, widows can remarry, and divorce is allowed. They have their customs of marrying, remarrying or choosing a mate; when husband and wife leave each other, they can both remarry. A widow can remarry her late husband's younger brother, or any other man, given the full liberty, they honour it absolutely. Unlike city dwellers the Shabars do not crave for luxurious life. They are innocent people, they just enjoy their life of eating, drinking and merry making, they are untouched by the evil emotions of pride, jealousy, envy etc; they are happy enough with a cloth to cover their body, rice to quench their hunger and a mate to pour their emotions on.

Over the six decades a huge amount has been spent in the name of the Shabars but the community is still inflicted with low literacy, instability, and a life of acute poverty. Thus it is evident that a tribe rooted to a life style and culture built around forest gets disrhythmed and distorted when they are evicted from their natural habitat. The problem is compounded when the mainstream society fails to dispel the prejudice against the tribal community. The displacement of the forest people from their ecological set up for earning greater revenue or to privilege the affluent and mighty at the cost of the poor tribals ultimately marginalizes them. It is a welcome development that in recent years the government is trying to provide and restore their original environment through reforestation programmes in some selected areas but there are very few who enjoy these

benefits because it becomes irrelevant to them after the rupture in their life style. The protection from discrimination by affirmative action will accord respectable status to the indigenous people. Thus, the novella traces the origin of Lodha Shabars community closely bonded with nature and documents their sufferings. Mahasewta Devi's aim is to establish the tribal identity of the Shabars so that they no longer are driven from place to place, cruelly oppressed and insulted. She endeavours to reinstate some truths such as the heartless destruction of forests, the search of the forest children for forest abode, and the encroachment of towns and non-advasis upon adivasi land resulting in the curtailment of natural resources and affecting the simple way of Shabars' living.

Resorting back to the past cultural setting also meets with a setback because of the rupture created in the meanwhile. It comes to the fore that the displacement of the forest people from their ecology for earning greater revenue or to privilege the affluent and mighty at the cost of the poor tribals ultimately marginalizes them. It is a welcome development that in recent years the government is trying to provide and restore their original environment through reforestation programmes in some selected areas but there are very few who enjoy these benefits because it becomes irrelevant to them after the rupture in their life style. Seeking protection from discrimination, and by affirmative action, indigenous people will also prove constructive as it will allow them to enjoy a certain degree of respect.

#### **Works Cited:**

Devi, Mahasweta. *The Book of the Hunter*. Trans. Sagree and Mandira Sengupta. Calcutta: Seagull, 2009.

Chatterjee, Roma. "Orality, Inscription and Creation of a Newlore." Web. 4 August 2012.

<[Socrates.berkeley.edu/~carforum/volume/pdf/chatterjee.pdf](http://Socrates.berkeley.edu/~carforum/volume/pdf/chatterjee.pdf)>

Singh, Pankaj. "An Intimate View by Pankaj Singh." *Revolutionary Democracy*. V. 2 (1999). Web. 21 Jan 2012. <[www.revolutionarydemocracy.org](http://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org)>.