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Reforming Beliefs

**THE LAND OF THE INDIGENOUS: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WORLD OF
FICTION IN KABILAN VAIRAMUTHU AND MAHASWETHA DEVI****S. Karunya****ABSTRACT**

Tribals are the group of people who belong to the forests and their chief occupations are hunting, gathering of woods and forest products. The domination of the tribals is predominant in India and the aborigines in Australia. The life of tribal people and aborigines is always in the brim of annihilation. These sects of people are not treated with respect and are not given any importance in the society. In the process of industrialization and technical advancement, forests are devastated in order to evacuate native people from their places. Tribals are deeply rooted to their culture and tradition following certain myths, worship particular gods and goddesses. From Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*, it is evident that the indigenous people "believe they once ruled a great snake, because the tribals believe they once ruled a great snake kingdom until they were defeated by the gods of the Aryans." (6) The original inhabitants' struggles for survival- livelihood and existence have intensified and spread as never before in history. In West Bengal, the Communist Naxalite combined their own demands for land rights for the poor. In the same way, some Adivasis found themselves as part of a violent rebellious movement that made them enemies of the state and were subjected to severe prosecution.

Aborigines were the natives of Australia who belonged to the nation even before the colonization of British. The colonizers had upper hand over the nation and the people of the native land were not given any rights. Following the supremacy of Britain, there began a movement in Australia for the fairer treatment of the Australian aboriginals. For so many years, the natives were not given rights to vote and as such, in 1960 they were granted permission for the same. The indigenous people grew rebellious as they did not appreciate slavery. Racial discrimination is also predominant in the nation of Kangaroos. If the native of the lands could not understand the plight of these people, then who else could comprehend their agony?

Introduction

The establishment of the 'Zamindari' system that conferred control over vast territories have confined the cherished abode of the adivasi people. The social and political atrocities are done against the natives. The word 'marginalised' refers to the group of people who are divested of their minimal rights and are exploited by the society. They have no representatives or spokesperson to voice out their problems in the society. In the process of the construction of dam, Government orders innocent tribal people to evacuate from their home lands. As the marginalized people of that area are not ready to move away, the government officials make them to go away by their imperializing force. In the process of vacating these people, the officials gang raped so many innocent young lass and murdered defenseless lads. The aborigines faced different facets of problem like the hosts of the land remained less compared to the guests of the land. Aborigines are natives to Australia and Tasmania who have lived there for about 35,000 to 70,000 years. The natives have reduced in the population when compared to their numbers before the colonization. Once they were the ruling sectors, but they are just the remainders now. Even though they are given free education, they are not given position to hold in any Government sector.

The select works of Mahaswetha Devi are taken in order to perceive the condition of the tribal people. Mahasweta Devi, an activist as well as a well-established feminist writer of Bengal, has dedicated much of her activism and literature to the cause of betterment of tribal people and their environment in India. Through *Breast Stories* and *After Kurukshetra*, Mahaswetha Devi brings to limelight the socio, economic and political deprivation of the natives. Along with the writer, other social activists who have led environmental causes and movements are Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy and C.K Janu. Kabilan Vairamuthu who belongs to Tamilnadu has focused his attention on the Australian aborigines through the novel *Planet Boomerang*. He is the second son of the acclaimed poet Kaviarasu Vairamuthu and the younger brother of Madhan Gorki. Through the novel, the writer exhibits how the native people languish to relish the freedom and as such, their thirst for identity is also portrayed.

Mahaswetha Devi and Kabilan Vairamuthu have taken efforts to highlight the atrocities that are faced by the socially and politically devastated first inhabitants of India and Australia.

However, even though the countries in which they live differ from each other, the tribulations of the native people of these two nations remain the same. Both the writers have given voice for the people whose voices go unheard by the society. Mahaswetha Devi throws light only on the women sects who have undergone acid tests in their day to day life. As such, Kabilan Vairamuthu like a representative of Australia talks for all the natives of the land in common.

In *Breast Stories*, Mahaswetha Devi envisions the agony of marginalized women. The writer has penned down three stories in which the thread that ties the three stories together is the breast. She has modeled the first story with Draupadi in the imitation of Narmada valley project. The writer has dealt with the same incidents of gang rape and protests through the character of Draupadi or Dopdi Mejhen. She is a rebel, hunted down by the government in their attempt to subjugate these groups. The government uses all forces available to them, including kidnapping, murder, and rape, and any tribal deaths in custody are invariably 'accidents'. But, Dopdi is not easily cowed by these homicidal men as she was so powerful than men in fighting and hunting. To bring her down by force, the officials decided to plot against her. As a result, Dopdi has been gang raped by the officials and started bleeding heavily. She becomes furious when she analysed her own situation. With the mode of frustration, "Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid." (37)

The character of Dopdi is an imitation of *Mahabharata's* Draupadi. Now, the reason of giving the name of Draupadi for Dopdi is very obvious. Both of them are disrobed and humiliated by a man before the crowd of men. Further, Draupadi has decided to avenge her humiliation through one of her husbands, Bhima. But here, Dopdi is so bold and valiant and did not give time for those officials to feel happy about their success. Dopdi decided to take up her own body as the rival for the oppressors. Asking officials to hurt her further, she stood erect without any tint of fear. Thence, she used her powerful weapon of her body, to make them ashamed of their behavior.

In *Behind the Bodice: Choli ke Picche*, Upin, an ace photographer comes across a tribal lady whose breasts are of 'mammoth projections.' Immediately Upin was drawn towards the girl Gangor who was married already and had sired a baby. She did not take any care to cover her

breasts. Instead she demanded money to capture photo of hers'. When the photos of Gangor had been distributed everywhere, she faced lots of troubles in the name of police. As a result, Gangor became a prostitute and Upin was in absolute shock when he found out the truth. In the end, Upin was not able to find out the same massive figure of her breasts, rather her bosoms looked flat with full of dried wounds. The condition of Gangor was due to the malicious character of policemen who did not know how to treat the voice less people.

After Kurukshetra is a collection of three unique stories by Mahaswetha Devi which discuss the aftermath of the Kurukshetra war. In all the three stories, she has glorified about the harmonious living style of the tribal women. No one has thought about the aftermath of Kurukshetra war in this perspective other than Devi. Thence, Devi has given an imaginary plot against the grain. The first story is about five women from the Janavritta who are asked to keep company with Uttara, the pregnant young widow of Abhimanyu. The story deals with the different opinions or view, they share with each other. In the war, thousands of men have sacrificed their life for the sake of their own kingdoms. Yet, the dead bodies of the warriors were not cremated with rituals. Even though these five women have lost their husbands, they do not wail for it every day. When it comes to Uttara, she possesses everything and lives prosperously wealth with her mother-in-laws. Nevertheless, she laments for the loss of her husband and ululates day and night. According to women of rajavritta "The life now lies before them, an unending desert." (5)

Gandhari, Subhadra and Draupadi have their husbands to accompany them in their life. The three women feel sad that the young women have lost their husbands and these elderly people are still accompanied by their husbands. These elderly women exhibit concern for those young widows. The young widows have not lived their life. They have so much to learn and enjoy from their life. The five women of Janavritta, who are named after rivers and food grains, have been appointed to look after Uttara. Uttara enjoys the company of these women and after some days she couldn't be without these people. These young widows teach her what nature is, life is and a true devotion is. In the royal household the child can stay with the mother only for a year and then the wet nurses take care of the child. Women of Rajavritta mourn for the loss till their death.

Once we return, all of us together will perform the necessary funerary rituals for our dead. Then the elders will arrange marriages. We need husbands, we need children. The village needs to hear the sound of chatter and laughter. We will...create life. That's what nature teaches us. (22)

Through the above quote, the women of the Janavritta say that the marginalised people exhibit how happily they lead their life without any rules. They are gratified with their life as it is an ecstasy in poverty. To these women, life is simple and they do not find any reason to think life as complicated "They ask for coloured yarn. Fetching grass and vines, their skillful fingers weave baskets, mats and ropes while they sit and talk." (6) Uttara is heartbroken when these women have decided to go on in their way to find the fulfillment of life. Even the women of rajavritta are elated about the nature of these women and Draupadi blesses them as "May you find peace, may you find fulfillment, may you return to the world of the everyday life." (23)

In the second story, the Nishadin, tribal or forest dweller, the daughter-in-law of the old Nishadin here reminds Kunti that she has forgotten to confess that she and her sons killed a tribal mother and her five sons in the lac house. Kunti has never married a man to whom she has begotten children nor she bore children for the man to whom she was married. The intention of Kunti is to make Duryodhana believe that she and her sons are dead. Kunti confesses in her heart for the sins she had committed so far. But she had forgotten about the incident of lac house fire. The situation is when Kunti is in the forest tending to Dhritarashtra and Gandhari. Till this time she has not thought seriously about her sins. Nevertheless, she admits her guilt, shame and a desire for the punishment only after she encounters the Nishadins. As Kunti had set fire for the innocent tribal mother and her sons, now the same incident gets repeated to Kunti. Now Kunti, Dhritarashtra and Gandhari were killed by the forest fire "The fire will do its work, then rain will quench the flames. The scorched earth will turn green again." (39) Nishadins avenge their husband's deaths by the forest fire. In *After Kurukshetra*, Mahaswetha Devi draws the realistic picture of the trouble of tribal women. Right from the ancient time, they are marginalized in the society and are not treated as the compeers to the upper caste people.

In *Planet Boomerang*, Kabilan Vairamuthu draws the attention of the readers towards Australian aborigines. Mahendran is the protagonist who has joined Sociology in Australian

University where the students have come to study from all over the world. Like Tribals, aborigines also wish to identify them one with nature “Aborigines are Australia’s native people. Humans evolved in Africa and travelled through Southeast Asia, finally reaching Australia, I’ve read.” (20) In the works of these writers, it is vivid that people turn out to be the refugees and revolutionaries simply due to the fact that their rights are being thwarted by the politicians. Racial violence is predominant in the Kangaroo nation as the natives are not in a spirit to welcome the students from across the globe as they themselves have been denied of. They do not like to entertain people who are of dusky complexion. Mahendran was compelled to join as the representative of Aborigines in the Union. When Namathjira and Mahendran had a conversation in the Aborigines Radio Station, Namathjira explains about the history of the native people:

Aborigine is not a single race. It is a name that has come to stay for denoting different races that have the same way of life. Each race has its own land of origin. For all those who live in this radio station, the Uluru Caves are the ancestral roots. (76)

The population of the natives remained great in number before few decades. But according to the recent analysis, population of the aborigines constitutes only 2.5%. The main reason for such difference is due to the domination of the Irish and the Scots in Australia. Apart from free housing and free education, aborigines “endeavour to function as a movement, to fight and press for our rights.” (77) They want to create a representation for them in the society as the life span of ordinary Australian is 70 years and of aborigines is 40 years. These people expect the cost of the technical education to be brought down; expects the participation in the national policies; plans that are made with future perception; actions should be based on human rights laws; adequate money to be allotted for education, agriculture, employment and so on; a special grading systems for the students and the mobile universities are expected. Mahendran had prepared certain list for the sake of the natives that the mobile universities have to be created to educate and employ the aboriginals “If this is adopted for the next ten years alone, the social status of an entire generation living in forests and caves can be uplifted.” (90) These people are well known to project their culture and tradition through the forms of art and painting. The Aravaltza festival was being celebrated in the woods as the eight day festival was one of the

important ceremonies of the race of Namathjira. The significance of the festival is to pay respect for snakes, crabs and bandicoots and some other rare species and to celebrate with animal dances. A man-sized Boomerang was gifted to Mahendran as he voiced for the native people and made their dreams come true.

It is evident from the texts that are taken for the study that the tribals in India and Australia fight for their justice in unison. In both the nations, lands have been grabbed and spoiled only after the invasion of Colonisers. Politicians remain unmoved even after witnessing the physical and the mental torture that are undergone by the natives. The natives have altogether been misrepresented as the revolutionaries as they fight for their integrity and righteousness. Tribals in India rebel for their lost lands and the aborigines of Australia for the development of the condition of the natives. As mentioned earlier, being a woman Mahaswetha Devi has highlighted the sufferings of the tribal women both in the era of *Mahabaratha* and in the present scenario. However, Kabilan Vairamuthu focuses on the troubles of the entire natives of the land. Both the writers have witnessed the menace those are incessantly faced by the indigenous people.

Mahaswetha Devi gives voice to the voiced less and liberates their standard from the subaltern stage to the subjective stage. Mahaswetha Devi has taken the responsibility to illuminate the trouble of such forgotten, secluded, marginalized women in her works through the use of myth. She deals with the theme of suppressed women in almost all her works. Through *Planet Boomerang*, Kabilan Vairamuthu warns the society about the condition of the extinction of natives of Australia as they are being denied to perform many rights. In the end note, he says that at least here after, the dark race should be given complete importance in order to raise the standard of the nation. Taking the creative writing as a tool, both the writers have fictionalized the facts and have created awareness among the people regarding the issue of extinction of the tribes. The tribes have to be educated in order to voice out their problems.

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