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Pathetic life of tribal outcaste in the story Arjun by Mahasweta Devi

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(10)

Mahasweta Devi is the most famous writer who has dedicated her entire life to the tribal cause. She has been working among the tribals and writing about them for more than three decade. She has been involved deeply with the tribal and their life in the Chhotanagpur region and she has written number of novels and short stories and article concerning tribal issues and problems. Her novel reveals a strong sense of commitment to the exploited classes for society the tribal peasant, the proletarian women. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in one times Mahasweta Devi is the only Bengali novelists in whose work, one of the main battle of Indian society. The present story "Arjun" is reveal the pathos of tribal people. Mahasweta Devi focuses on the life of tribal people and their efforts for survive. The whole story is turn around the Arjun tree. The tree is the symbol of God. It is very oldest tree closely associated with culture of the tribal people. The Arjun tree is sacred to many native people. This tree is the last symbol of Bandihi jungle of the earlier Zamindari rule.

Bisal Babu and Ram Haldar are the people from two different political banners. One is from panchayat and other is from saw mill. Bisal Mehta summons Ketu Shabbar and asks him to feel the Arjun tree. Mahata assures him that the later will not be arrested without satisfying there two gods, it is difficult to survive in this area. They too know well that in order to accomplish their work. They need the Shabbar people. However, Ketu does not want to cut the trees. The story "Arjun" is deals with the serious problem of cutting trees. The story is milestone document on the environmental as well as social awareness through the realistic portrayal of the pathetic life of the tribal communities in the forest of West Bengal. It focuses how the political leaders use their power for their own motive and compel the tribal people to cut trees after trees.

The character in the story Ketu, Diga and Pitamber belongs to tribal community called Shabbar. They are forced to cut the trees from the forest for the landlord like Bisal Babu and Ram Haldar. They are different parties publically Bisal Babu and Ram Babu are opponent and criticize each other but they secretly work for each other "Ram Haldar and Bisal Mehta may be the people under two different political banners, but in the eye of Ketu both are the same".

Unfortunately cutting the tree is the main business of Shabbar cutting their trees and going to jail is the rule of the area. Rambabu was not only in business of cutting and selling trees, he also takes the leading role in to campaigns of the government "Save the tree Save the forest" also takes part in the tender of selling government forest. He himself secretly removes the trees. The poor tribal people like Ketu cut the trees and they were rewarded by Alcohol, Axes, Torchlight or a radio or a clock or cassette player or in some cases even a cycle of course country wine. One who holds an axe must go to jail this is the rule of the area there is no way to get out from shackles of rule. The poor tribal people cut the tree and they just get the poor things like axe and radio but the Rambabu and Bisal Mehta are the Zamindar. They force them to cut the tree and get money from the selling the tree and they built big houses in the city. "The people like Ram Haldar will build their big houses in the town of Bankur and Purulia".

The tribal people present in the story were illiterate but they are very sharp and smart. They know the nature of political people. Diga is only respect person among them because he has attended the informal education classes for four days arranged by the government. Diga is smart among his friend.

Arjun is the name of the oldest tree which stands at the crossing of the tree roads in the village. Arjun tree is closely associated with the tribe culture. This particular tree is the only surviving historical objective of the Bandihi jungle from the Zamindar area. The elder of the tribe still respect the Arjun tree. They believe that it is the manifestation of the divine. The old people of the village have absolute faith in the tree. Even the tree is the symbol of food, cloth, and shelter. They were worshiping the tree as a God. "During the marriage and festival, we go to tree and beat our drum of 'dhol and dhamas' There we bury our hair from shaved head in the name of God" When the Arjun



tree was young, everyday used to go to pay their offerings before going for hunting for so many years the tree protected them like a guard. The Arjun tree is sacred tree to many native.

Bisalbabu wanted the tree for his personal use. He wanted the tree by hook or crook. He knew that it was an ancient huge tree the local people had special respect for Arjun. He offered money and alcohol to them. The tribe peoples are very faithful. They decided to save the tree. They are determines that they should protected the tree. They decided to save tree because it is reserved by all the shabbars, khairias and oracns. Diga suggest that they should gather around Arjun tree and worship it with garlands, santhals, kherias, sahis and Bhumijas all gather there. It turns almost into a fair. People beats drums of dhamas dhols and play flutes. "Many people have gathered around the tree and the tree is being worshiped with garlands."

Arjun by Mahasweta Devi is a story that has much relevance in the Global world we all live in now. Anything is for sale and little care or concern is often paid to our ecological environmental. Here in the story tribal are able to overcome the landlord, but it is not always the case. It is so difficult to come out of the clutches of the moneylenders. The tribal are all the mercy of the dominant society. The moral of the story is "save the tree, save the forest".