

Development and Growing Adivasi Landlessness– In the Select Novels

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Abstract

Present paper aims to discuss discourses of development activities as reflected in the Santali novels. These literary writings focused life and living of 'Adivasi' under the aegis of development activities just after independence in India. The Santali novel '*Namalia*' written by Somai Kisku describes experience of a Santali family, had been displaced due to construction of a dam. Other novel *Eter Pare Int* describes plight of the migrant labourer and problems of human trafficking during post-colonial period. The novel *Eter Pare Int* describes violence against women laborers of tribal and scheduled castes communities in eastern India. This is a novel on migrant laborers of present Jharkhand tells roles of intermediaries in women trafficking, who work as supplier of laborers in kiln are situated in the adjacent areas of Kolkata. Another novel of Mahasweta Devi, *Suraj Gagrai*, describes life of a tribal army man of Kolhan region, who received awards from the Indian Army for his Heroic contribution. A duty bound trip in his own native place had changed his understanding on life. He saw how army and police treat tribal people. He left job, and came back to his native village. A new journey happened in his life, when mining activities started in his village and adjacent areas.

Key words : *Development activities; Namal; Namalia; Changing meaning of Bargadar; Kisar;*

Introduction

The development activities during post –colonial situation received highest priority from both the side of government and tribal people. That might be the reason authors of select novels referred here never criticize development activities even when people have lost their homestead lands, cultivable lands for construction of dams or for mining activities. Authors find the problems as personal and social, sometime rooted in tradition. The concept *Namalia* the title of the novel (Kisku 2008) originally describes seasonal migration of indigenous men and women to work as agricultural labourers from chotanagpur region to plains of Bengal. Both the places either in the rural Bengal or in the Santal villages the word carried the same meaning and that was seasonal agricultural labourer work in the cultivable field in rural Bengal and went back to their respective villages after earning wages. During middle part of nineteenth century 'Indentured labour law', new land and forest policies of British Government aggravated migration of tribal people from the Chotagnagpur to Bengal, Assam and beyond. In this new phase of migration, people were compelled to settle down

to the places they had migrated. The literary account of the novel *Namalia* reinstates the migration history of the Santals with another meaning. This paper wishes to discuss the new meaning of old economic organizations at the backdrop of development.

Both the writers wrote their novels at the background of establishment of dams. The universe of the authors was West Bengal and present Jharkhand. In 1956, the river dams on the Kongsaboti and Kumari Rivers established in the state of West Bengal. It had assured water storage for irrigation purpose to a large area in the district of Bakura, and adjacent districts bordering Jharkhand and West Bengal. “The Mukutmunipur dam was planned to provide major irrigation facilities to 8,000 square kilometers of agricultural land” in the south western districts of WB. (<http://westbengal.news.blog>mukutmanipur>). The Kangsabati river dam popularized as tourist spot of Mukutmunipur. This reservoir submerged many Santal villages in the beginning of the development era in India. Mega dams, water reservoirs submerged areas in the places like Dhanbad, Teniyaconark, Tenughat, Panchet, Maithon on the rivers Borakar, Damodar and Kongsaboti that uprooted the tribal people.

Mining was another earlier engagement of the British colonizers. Chotangpur plateau and adjacent areas of present West Bengal was a rich spot for mining. The extraction of mining products continued from colonial time to post colonial time as part of development activities. The coal fields like Jharia, Raniganj, west, and east Bokaro, Ramgarh, south and north Karampura are famous spots in popular literature. Other mining products like iron ore, asbestos, Chromites, Mica, and Keyonite are extracted from the districts like Dhanbad, East west Singbhum, Ranchi and Ramgarh of present Jharkhand. All the districts of Jharkhand mentioned here are predominantly tribal areas and famous for forestlands. The establishment of mining companies and river dams must have generated employment and revenue. Most importantly, the water bodies attracted tourists in the region.

Those colonial and post-colonial development activities extracted natural resources for financial benefits continued after India attained independence. Many commercial activities like dam construction; coal mining became part of development history writings as well as literary writings. At this background, present paper discusses a few novels written in the Santali and Bengali languages to understand how literary studies discovered development related landlessness. Select novels discuss life experiences of people. The Santali novel *Namalia* (2008) written by Mr. Somai Kisku; two novels- *Suraj Gagrai* (1984) and *Eter Pare Int* (1982) written by ‘Mahasweta Devi’s are referred here.

Review of Literature

This paper finds new historicists approach as relevant to understand contemporary realities as ingrained in the novels and the connectedness of authors with the themes and text of novels.. Juri Datta (2022: 50) writes that new historicists approach finds interrelationship between people history and literary works, which are not isolated from social realities. Mahasweta Devi had similar opinion. Mahasweta devi identifies literary writings as deeds of the society. Datta says words, images, metaphors, symbols all are cultural expressions connect historical backgrounds in a novel. Datta says that the presence of history in the

literary texts is inevitable. Datta indicates that the presence of the writer in the text of writing is no less important issue. Ideologies of writers and the text they produce create a reciprocal relation between reader and writer. The theorists find the approach as powerful that connects literature with realities.

The regime of 'Developing nation' India completed seven decades and evaluative writings on it is available. Critical analysis on the development aspects by Banerjee (2021: 4) identifies parameters like 'man made floods, inadequate storage facilities of river dams, reduction of space in those dams to carry flood discharge, sedimentation of channels, happened due to mega dam constructions. This is an evaluation after more than half of a century admits the growth rate was slow than the planners assumed! Banerjee (Ibid) in this writing discusses possibilities of sustainable water management. However, by this time of analysis, six decades are over and two generations of the Adivasi communities faced displacement. This displaced people are missing subject in this article of Banerjee (Ibid).

Evaluating 'development' is one of the engagements of the social scientists and volumes of literature from them available in India. A latest publication (Sharma and Koley 2022: XI-XXXI) accommodated twenty-five research papers on different themes; review of frequently refereed parameters postulate development as sign of progress. None of these articles identified parameters to study exploitations against tribal/Adivasi people.

Gupta (2015: 1) in her edited book published 19 research articles and essays. These articles discuss 'exploitation' as parameter to understand tribal underdevelopment. The editorial of this book is immensely significant for its title. The title of the editorial is "Kisan se Kailachor" (From Peasant to the Coal-Thief: The Social Transformation). This article describes that the "Adivasi" people not only displaced from the ancestral lands, forests, and water bodies, it has uprooted them from their social values, honesty and ideals, and art of living. They are detached from mother tongue, culture, very fast. Dominant mainstream people's engagement in execution of development policies' implementation sped up processes of displacement. The tribal people had to sacrifice for highly ambitious development projects on non-renewable energy sectors' profit. Millions of people forced to take up jobs of labor from self-relied and sustainable economic activities. One quarter among two and half lakh people displaced from their cultural ecology to avail inadequate rehabilitation policies. This rehabilitation schemes could not fulfill minimum requirements to practice their indigenous and traditional knowledge of livelihood. The development policies also after independence could not ensure equal facilities to all citizens in India. Innumerable tribal people were get deprived in the name of nation building and sacrificed ancestral lands. Non-implementation of the constitutional facilities in letter and spirits deprived tribal. All the essays in this book ably created critical space to perceive "development". Moreover, the essays in this book identified similar issues like Mahasweta Devi and Somai Kisku to portrait dark spots in the development programs. Tirkey (2015:43) refers court cases against forceful occupation of landed properties for construction of heavy engineering companies, dams, etc. , which culminated to displacement of the Adivasi families in large scales in

different areas of the then Bihar and present Jharkhand. Tirkey (ibid 48) reveals that the idea of Macro level development by establishing big dams, mega industries, etc. were not very attractive to the Adivasis, because they developed a critical understanding against consequences of development. Being an Adivasi scholar by birth Tirkey reveals that the “*Vikas*” (development) and “*Vinas*” (destruction) have integral relationship in the life of Adivasi people. Gupta (ibid) finds exploitation of the dominant hegemonic communities as a parameter to understand the tribal/ Adivasi underdevelopment.

Select Novels under Study

Novels written by Somai Kisku, and Mahasweta Devi consecutively stressed on the age-old issues of social discriminations of dominant and hegemonic communities under the shadow of development policies. The texts of the three novels refer complex history of the tribal people as disadvantageous minorities under dominant caste communities. Mahasweta Devi's two Novels *Suraj Gagrai (Biography of Suraj Gagrai)* and *Enter Pare Int (Brick above brick)* describe painful experiences of the persons/characters in the novels. The novel *Suraj Gagrai* on the Kol (Ho) tribal community describes experiences of father and son, at the background of mining and dam construction activities. Another novel of the same author written at the background of mining activities, the trafficking of Adivasi women from the villages to brick kiln of Kolkata.

Themes of these novels grounded in the life experiences of the tribal people of the geographical regions, in which after fifty years of establishment of the dam on the Kongsaboti river and submerging of tribal villages like Tumang gosaidi, Barughutu, Basantapur, Nilgiri, Gorabari, Rajabali, Baria badi, Ichang Marang, Jhapandi, the novel was published in 2008. That memorized biographical account of a few members of a family. Those places mentioned above originally existed as villages of the Santals. The title of the novel in its cultural meaning and has a geographical dimension and the word ‘*Namalia*’ is a Santal word. The Santal of Rarnd and Manbhum area of west Bengal refer the lower region of Gangetic plain as *Namal* and those persons as *Namalia* who migrate towards Bengal as agricultural labourer since past. Santali young men and women went to those villages by the sides of the Bhagirathi River to work as seasonal agriculture labors. The novel *Namalia* is an account of the life sketch of people, who transformed from peasants to labors during the development regime of post-colonial India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study literary expressions on the landlessness of tribal people during development era
2. To study exploitation of tribal women in the development regime

Methodology

This study depends on the literary sources, novels, and non-fictional writings to analyze the history of growing landlessness related to tribal development as reflected in novels.

These three novels published in 1982, 1984, and 2008. The parameters to study Development (Sharma & Koley 2022) could not identify the parameter 'exploitation' in any research articles. Present study proposes that the parameter 'exploitation' as identified in the edited book of Gupta (2008/2015) is significant for understanding these three select novels.

Finding and Analysis

***Namalia* written by Somai Kisku (2008)**

The main character 'Madan' in the novel *Namalia* remembers ancestral traditions. Santal men and women as a family seasonally migrated and sometime settled to those places of Bengal. The title of the novel constructs a social history of the Santal. The word "*Namalia*" refers those who went to the West Bengal to work as agricultural laborers seasonally. This was an age-old practice of the people. The agricultural families of Bengal also waited for the seasonally migrating laborers to their villages from the Chottanagpur region. Madan also worked as a labourer in *Namal* before he permanently migrated, last time he migrated with his family members. The story of the novel traces experiences of a few family members at the background of construction of dam in their ancestral village. After receiving the compensation, those families mostly migrated to nearby villages, while Madan one of the young men preferred to go to *Namal*. His wife and two daughters migrated with him and they all went to the *Jamindar* Sujit Datta, who was employer of Madan once upon a time. Madan went and stayed there as a worker and planned to settle at *Namal* permanently forever. Before, going to *Namal* Madan was happy with the life and living in his home village surroundings, in the forest, hills, and stream sides. Sudden change in the cultural geography due to construction of dam compelled people to move away. His sisters invited him to stay with them. They wanted to share their landed properties with him but he was interested to work under Sujit Datta, 'Kisar' (a rich man). Kisku describes the struggle of Madan after he reached to the house of his employer. Sujit Datta allotted cowshed for the staying of Madan's family and employed him as shepherd during lean period and ploughman for tilling land in agricultural season. Madan met Santal families there, who were settlers of that village. He purchased land from them within a few years and started cultivation. Initially, Sujit Datta did not know it. Sujit Datta also had a plan to purchase the same land from Santal owner. Datta heard that Madan purchased that land, and so Datta made an enquiry about the source of money of Madan. Madan informed him about the compensation he received from the Government and which he utilized for purchasing land. Life did not remain same. Madan's wife met an early death when daughters were in teen age. Madan after daughters' marriage a loner and suffered from disease. Loneliness, hard work, and crop failure made Madan sick. Later, after he diagnosed with tuberculosis, elder daughter and her husband invited him to stay with them.

Madan always trusted the employer Sujit Datta completely. Once Madan took loan from Sujit Datta long after death of his wife and daughters got married. Sujit Datta lends him money. Madan signed papers not knowing what on paper in black and white. Insistence from daughter and son in law compelled Madan to meet Sujit Datta. Madan informed him that he would dispose off his landed property and stay with daughter's family. Madan wanted to repay the loan, demanded back papers on which he put signature for loan. Sujit

Datta informed him that by giving money to Madan he became '*Bargadar*' of Madan.

Sujit Datta cheated Madan by misusing land reform act West Bengal. This land reform act (1956) helped landless people in West Bengal. As per the provision of this act the Government during 1980s and onwards allotted agricultural lands to the landless agricultural labourer families. The Government used to sieve access lands beyond ceiling limits from big landowners, and distributed to the agricultural labourer. The novel *Namalia* written by Somai Kisku has describes manipulative activities of the landowner like Sujit Datta. Madan not being an educated man migrated to West Bengal for better living, after receiving compensation for surrendering ancestral land for mining activities. He trusted Sujit Datta. In reality, Madan was a '*Namal*' (seasonal landless labourer) under Sujit Datta. But land hungry Sujit Datta cheated illiterate Madan through written record in which Sujit Datta is a '*Bargadar*' of Madan!

The novel ends here.

***Suraj Gagrai* Written by Mahasweta Debi**

Suraj Gagrai written by Mahasweta Debi is a historical novel describes protest of exploited mass of people, who are in the colonial and post-colonial record known as 'Kol', 'Ho' of the Kolhan region. This novel describes leaders of tribal background of three generations, who fought against exploitations in their own villages and regions. The 'thikedars' and contractors settled in the tribal villages exploited them. Mahasweta describes how the manipulative exploitative corrupted Raol Saheb misused government rules and regulations to exploit natural recourses of forests, land of tribal regions. Non-tribal Raol Saheb filled up auction forms to participate in timber trading of forest departments, in the name of Chand Gagrai (a tribal name), who was never existed in reality. Raol Sahib received license for cutting big trees and selling timber by false license; that rich man received supports of caste community backgrounds and non-tribal, and he, who even sold lands of tribal to Mata Gagrai, who was a tribal man; Mata being a tribal purchased a land which was a tribal land and not for sale. Later, the same Raol Sahib and his associates controlled the Government machineries to appropriate the resources of development activities. This novel described deep-rooted corruptions practiced in the establishment of dam building, land acquisitions for that project, and mining. Mata Gagrai, the grandfather of Suraj Gagrai, Kalu Sumrai, the teacher of Suraj Gagrai narrate stories of exploitation of dominant people belong to caste based communities and different regions of India. The novel portrays biography of Suraj Gagrai, who fought against corrupted Raol Saheb and his associate to save the tribal of his community. The novel ends in police attack and in the encounter to death of Suraj Gagrai, the Hero among the Ho, whom Indian administration falsified as a lawbreaker. This novel talks of collective protests of Ho ancestors since colonial period. It unfolds roles of Indians, who exploited Adivasi people just like colonial rulers. Therefore, development activities in the tribal regions tell other stories.

***Inter Pare Int* written by Mahasweta Devi**

This novel manifests cultural mechanism of exploitation of hegemonic social group/ community/people against the marginal indigenous communities. Author identified every

manipulative human agency engaged in exploitation of the 'Adivasi'/'Dalit'. This novel is a compilation of big stories in which the exploited mass suffer constantly in all space and time. Societies create heroes to protest and die. The exploitation never ends. From colonial to post-colonial to nationalist situation Jotedars, traders, officers, priests, police remain agencies that look down upon the Adivasi men and women as 'jungli' or wild people. In every story, there are ideologues, they describe social history of exploitation, and they identify human actors and agencies of exploitations against the tribal, marginal, forest dwellers.

Mahasweta's tribal protagonists of this novel are always, watchful, discover different sources of exploitative behaviors of the powerful people, dream to put an end of such activities, deliver messages to gain strength, rape victims gather courage to destroy evils.

This novel describes the painful experiences of the underprivileged tribal men and women under the shadow of development. The timeline of the novel is the second half of the twentieth century, and that is the regime of developing era in the nation India. In novel of Mahasweta people speak differently about the social aspect, it dissects morality of officers of privileged caste backgrounds, their hegemonic philosophy. The jotedars, contractor, arm dealers represent kin group of dominant castes, who maintain shifting alliances for their personal benefits. Severely tortured rape victim with the help of sex worker exposes police officer of privileged caste origin, who was proud of his caste position, but in the records of investigation of enquiry commission is a corrupted, exploitative, rapist patriarch.

The novel *Inter Pare Int* describes a post-colonial highly corrupted society. Big landowning males kill protagonist for protesting, for articulating voices of labourers in support of abolition of bonded labour law, for demanding wages, for liberating self and other tribal wage earners from control of the jotedar after abolition of bonded labour institution in India (1976). Author describes practices of sending gifts of Jotedars, arms dealers, for maintenance of networks of higher caste people to maintain illegal against tribal and daily labours.

The author in this novel creates space for raped victim, trafficked tribal women, and people who supported abolition of bonded labour law (1976); the tribal parents and spouse took stand for victims and their children, do not deserting them. The author incorporates progressives thoughts and debates like debates of socialists and feminists commission members on the crime against women is isolated phenomenon or connected to all other social evil practices.

Biographical Accounts of the two Authors

Somai kisku was born at the village of Bagan Para, post office Baichi Gram district of Hooghly in the state of West Bengal. (On 25th February in 1959) Being son of Rasik Lal Kisku and mother Fulmuni Kisku, Kisku did his graduation from Haripal Bibekanada Collage in 1980. Kisku wrote novels like Ratan (2002), Kherwal Sawtare Ratan (2006) Namalia (2008) and Baghai (2017), Author has received "Tegore Literature Award" (2010). In an

interview, Somai Kisku told to a journalist that he writes to preserve his mother tongue the Santali language. He expressed his gratefulness to the Santali speakers, who are custodians of the language and culture, who saved the tradition alive by practicing it. (m.timesofindia.com).

While Somai Kisku is an insider of the Santal community and of tribal origin, Mahasweta Devi born on 14 January in 1926 in Dhaka of present Bangladesh and lived, ninety years (died 28 July 2016 in Kolkata) was a Bengali by birth. She did BA in English (Honours) from Visva Bharati University and MA from Calcutta University. Her father Manish Ghatak was a writer and mother was Dharitri Devi. The Ghatak family was politically leftist and famous for their literary contributions. She continued footsteps of her father and uncle(s) one of them was famous filmmaker Hritwik Ghatak, who followed same ideology. She was a faculty member in college and got married to famous theatre personality Bijon Bhattacharya. The leftist inclination of the writer might have insisted Mahasweta Devi to write on social discrimination, exploitations, and gender inequalities, and persons who dream to fight back. A recipient of prestigious Academy Award (1979) of Government of India and Gyanpith Award (1996), and Ramon Magsaysay award (1997), Padmashree (1986) Banga Bibhusan (2011) and Padmabibhushan ((2006) wrote novels, stories on the sufferings and protests of the tribal people and for the rights of marginal people, specifically tribes of Chattishgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal. Mahasweta Devi was a human right activist and worked for the establishment of rights and empowerment of the Lodha, Shabar in particular. She basically wrote in the Bengali language and published novels like *Hajar Churashir Ma*, *Aranyer Adhikar*, *Rudali*, etc.

Analysis and Concluding Remarks

Three novels referred here represent second half of twentieth century and beyond. Protagonist of these novels are tribal men and women. Locations are mostly within the cultural geography of tribal communities of present Jharkhand and adjacent areas of West Bengal. These two neighbouring states are home of many tribes. While Jharkhand is predominantly a tribal state, and home of many tribes, in the state of West Bengal the Santal are second largest population. Both the author Somai Kisku and Mahasweta Devi are from West Bengal. They wrote in two different languages, which are their mother tongue. Somai Kisku belong to the same community of the protagonist Madan. The riverside planes is referred in his novel is situated in the same cultural geography author lives. The author and the tribal characters represent the Santal of West Bengal.

Main tribal protagonist characters of novels-*Suraj Gagrai* and *Inter Pare Int* of Mahasweta Devi are from Ho community of Jharkhand. Mahasweta Devi, basically a Bengali by birth and write in the same language is famous for her topics basically, she writes for the exploited people and tribal. The Ho community of present Jharkhand came in prominence since 1830s while people of their habitats organized social movement against British colonial tax policy as well as against the then Indian Jamindars, moneylenders, traders, of Indian origin.

The novel *Namalia* written by Somai Kisku describes social history of the Santal life and living. The word 'Namalia' in the Santali language refers to the agricultural laborers, who went down to cultivate lands in the Bengal side since long back. They work as seasonal laborers went back to their village every year. The word '*Namalia*' identifies seasonal occupation of a group of people in its original meaning. Somai Kisku symbolically used that word as title of his novel, which depicts other meaning. In his writing, Madan the central character of this novel is not a seasonal labourer rather a subject faces exploitation ever. Despite of so much personal initiative to achieve an economically better position, Madan had to face hurdles due to dominant hegemonic and exploitative mass of people and their behaviours, and activities.. The author Somai Kisku very efficiently penned down manipulative and corrupted behaviours of Sujit Datta. The misinterpretation of the concept '*Bargadar*' is a revelation for understanding that how dominant caste communities reinterpret rules and regulations to cheat tribal people in any situation. Both Somai Kisku and Mahasweta Devi locate activities of land brokers, who belong to caste communities of India. Earlier, those people were referred as Jamindar, Jotedar, etc.. Despite Jamindars are no more in India, but behavior of the land hungry people, their tricks to exploit tribal prominently depicted in the novels as remain same.

This novel *Namalia* describes life experience of members of family of Madan, his wife, mother, sister, and children. This novel describes the effects of displacement of the Madan and many other Santal families from their ancestral village due to construction of a dam. The family members of Madan after displacement left their village permanently. The family members faced premature death, unnatural death. Somai Kisku narrates painful life experience of Madan. Madan found that he could not make his mother happy, who migrated with him and later returned. Mother committed suicide. Madan felt guilty for mother's unnatural death and blamed himself responsible. Madan perceived unfriendly environment of West Bengal the village of Sujit Datta all to blame for mother's death. Madan fully trusted his employer Sujit Dutta, a landowner, and moneyed man. After death of his wife in snakebite, Madan felt that life might not be so painful if he stayed back with his sister's village! His wife might have live long! He lost his mother. She drowned in the water of the dam. *Namalia*, didn't focus anything against the development activities. Cannels of these river dams benefitted people. The first author Bisesswar Saren observes that in Binpur II block, district Jhargram, West Bengal, villages besides cannels of river dams mostly beneficial for irrigation during less rain. The river cannels of Binpur Block II are connected to Tarafeni river. This statement of Bisesswar is his life experience as a member of tribal peasant family.

Bisesswar Saren, the first author of this article a resident of Jamboni narrates a life experience on the stone mining activities happened in nearby village Kalias, block Binpur II, which is located within 10 kilomer. The quarry was on around five acres of land. The stones were available at a depth of 200-300 ft.. The '*khandri*' (very deep), abandoned queries full of water are site of high risk. *Khandri* cannot drain out water, not those places are habitable. Bisesswar heard from elders that the Kalias is a predominantly tribal area and people initially welcome this project. Blasting in the *Khandri* had broken wall of houses.

This was a turning point in people's life. A social movement against stone mining activities (during 2005-2006) ultimately discontinued this business of the trader came from outside of community and took support of a few members of the locality. Bisesswar was an adolescent boy while this quarry closed. Bisesswar personal observation is life of Adivasi people changed after they protest. A good many educated Adivasi persons are in responsible positions and in different jobs.

The human characters of these three novels, life experiences of the members, biographical backgrounds of novelists and Bisesswar Saren's life experience identify hegemony of mainstream people in development. These novels identify shadows under development. The quantitative approaches on development usually not apply the parameter to study "exploitation", mindless dominant hegemonic behaviour of privileged caste people engaged in delivering duties or implementing development program. These novels identify two worlds within the horizon of development and describe reasons of slow growth. Decolonizing of research methodologies, selecting new parameters, are immensely required to reflect tribal realities of landlessness.

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