

The Unsettled Question of Settlement in Mahaswetha Devi's *The Book of the Hunter*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 14 Sep 2023; Received in revised form: 06 Oct 2023; Accepted: 16 Oct 2023; Available online: 23 Oct 2023</p> <p>©2023 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords— Brahmin, Shabars, Roots, Assimilation, Settlement, Cultural Identity</p>	<p>A settlement is a place where people reside for a long time. People acquire cultural identity when they establish themselves in a new location. The settlement issue between the Brahmin and the tribal group is the main concern of the study. It examines the pain that people experience when they move to a new place. One group's dread of another group causes them to relocate and change their means of subsistence. The goal of the paper is to demonstrate that the anguish of leaving one's own land is shared by Shabars and Brahmins alike, and that the issue of settlement is a never-ending one. They experience great suffering because of their separation from their country when they are forced to relocate and abandon their roots.</p>

I. INTRODUCTION

Mukunda, a Brahman, and his spouse Jagadeshwari used to reside together. She was expecting their third kid and they already had two children. Meanwhile, there was a change in the ruling party in Daminya, the village where Mukunda resided. There will always be a change in power but the present administration has evil intentions and has imprisoned members of particular castes. Because of this, Mukunda moved to a different place. "He had been surviving in Daminya the way a tree lives by gripping the earth with its roots." Because of the terrible and challenging period, he was forced to move from Daminya to Ararha.

The Shabar tribal community resided in the "Chandi Bon" forest, which is close to the town of Ararha. Tejota, the daughter of Danko, the leader of the Shabars, was abandoned by her husband. The tribes' legacy needs to be passed on to her son Kalya. Mukunda makes friends with Kalya and Phuli, who

were Shabars, after moving to Ararha. Shabars were subsistence forest dwellers. In exchange for rice, salt, pepper, and oil, they used to hunt animals, gather honey and sell their goods in the town. They were in harmony with the natural world, reaping the rewards of the forest and never lacking for anything, but they faced danger when the settlements of Ararha pushed further into the forest. "The city's influencing our community and it frightens me, baba," Tejota stated to Danko. Danko gave Kalya the task of hunting the King elephant, Airavat, to test his strength and maturity. When Kalya failed to do so, the elephant killed him, and Phuli, unable to face the loss of her beloved, also drowned in the tank. Three weeks after Phuli and Kalya were buried, the entire Shabar community moved to look for another forest.

II. DISCUSSION

Settlements are defined as human population centers that have created a long-term community in a specific area. The complexity of a settlement can vary, ranging from little fishing villages on a remote river to large population centers like metropolises. Settlements can be referred to by a number of titles, such as bases, towns, villages, cities, hamlets, and camps. A settlement can be defined as any organized pattern of habitation. Settlements can yield historical significance, such as the date and the original settlers of a location. Settlements might have sophisticated infrastructure such as parks, towers, and highways, or they can have simple amenities like irrigation systems and earthen fences.

Mukunda resided in Daminya along with his family. People from a certain community were compelled to relocate when the government changed, for their protection. They suffered and were disregarded. They gradually began to relocate from their native region to another area. Mukunda had to leave his roots behind because he is a member of a minority community and had to relocate. He was greatly troubled by this and lamented having to leave his native country. Since Tadulkar, who is currently under custody, cares more about Mukunda than he does, if Mukunda doesn't leave soon, he is likely to end up in jail. This could lead to Mukunda being detained next.

The families of Devananda and Ramcharan have already departed. Most people who belonged to his caste have migrated out of the village, if Mukunda and his family stay, he would be in serious danger. When Mukunda's uncle would tell him to depart from the area, Mukunda would always respond, "Where could I go?" since he didn't know any other places except Daminya. Having spent his entire life getting to know this community, he suddenly feels heartbroken when Daminya turns him away from his homeland. It felt like his mom was telling him to "Go away child! you're in great danger!" Jagadeshwari started crying when Mukunda informed her that they were leaving the village. Brahmins were forced to relocate repeatedly due to the constant changes in the political landscape. "Daminya who wouldn't hold on to her children and had to let them go over and over again."

When his wife asked him why he seemed to be absentminded so frequently, Mukunda said, "He need

the ink, pen, and the mind" to begin writing. He had a pen and ink, but his thoughts were drifting off. He was unaware of the exact moment at which his thoughts faltered. He was still recovering from the shock of fleeing his homeland. His true mother is Daminya, since he refers to Ararha as "another mother," but he didn't find serenity in Ararha. However, he discovered absolutely no peace. There was still something he needed to accomplish. Something remained unfinished from his actions.

The Shabars have a similar sense of homesickness. The woodland was home to the Shabars, a tribal people. The tribe considered the jungle to be their mother, and Mukunda considered Daminya to be his mother. Everything is available to everyone in the forest, including birds, animals, and Shabars. That was the expertise they had learned from their tribe; Kalya had killed his first tiger at the age of not even fifteen. For their mother is the tribal forest. They always have all they need and reap all of its rewards. Their work involves hunting and selling animal parts at the market in exchange for goods like rice, oil, salt, and pepper.

Kalya was terrified that if they continued to live in the forest, the invaders would eventually take control of their way of life and traditions. He observed significant differences in Phuli's lifestyle and behavior. Shabars generally ignored neatness and cleanliness. Kalya was completely opposed to assimilation, yet this stoked his fears about it. Because of Phuli's relationship with Brahmins, Kalya worries that Phuli would adopt their customs and way of life. Kalya is constantly concerned that Phuli may absorb the culture of the invaders. "Phuli seemed like a stranger to him sometimes." A few families, meanwhile, embraced the culture of the invaders.

In general shabars don't have the habit of saving food however Sana's family learnt to save the food. Traditionally, hay was used to construct roofs, but now leaves were used alternatively. They began "smoothing mud over their house walls" and embellished them with paintings that set them apart from the other Shabars' way of life. The fact that Sana's husband did not beat her and that they even hoarded rice indicates that the Shabars are under the sway of the invaders and that they must quickly relocate to a different forest.

The internal strife and disagreements among the tribal communities themselves are highlighted in the story, which emphasizes the complexity of the settlement issue. Tensions and rifts within the community result from the fact that some members support resistance and revolt against the Hunter's intrusion, while others are enticed by the promises of growth and modernization. Mahasweta Devi also examines the internal dynamics and conflicts among the tribal communities themselves in order to further investigate the intricacies of the settlement topic. While some members might be intrigued by the Hunter's promises of progress and modernization, others are unwavering in their resolve to protect their way of life, even at considerable personal expense.

Only Shabars were permitted entry into a temple dedicated to them. Their forefathers were tribals who were in charge of maintaining the temple but, after a Brahmin stole the idol, they lost their privilege to use the temple. Thus, there was a constant strife between the Brahmin and the indigenous people. "When the town advances, the Shabars will go away." Because the Brahmins stole shabars' deity Abhyachandi generations ago, Kalya dislikes them and the Shabars stopped trusting them. The tribe gradually became afraid that their way of life would disappear as the invaders continued to progressively take over the area. They desired to preserve their customs and culture rather than adopt the way of life of the invaders. Tribes would flee from invaders and look for another forest if their area was invaded.

Although they have roots in the forest as well, the invasion has forced them to relocate. When invaders take over their territory, both Mukunda and tribal people have no choice but to depart their homeland. Filled with anxiety and anguish, they migrate to a new land and establish new lives elsewhere. After Mukunda moved to Ararha from Daminya, the tribal people who had been living in the forest close to Ararha moved to another forest. Mukunda had an unconscious feeling that he was contributing to the Shabars' exodus.

They are forced to flee their homes, frequently by threats, intimidation, or open violence, and are placed in strange and unwelcoming surroundings. For the aboriginal people, the issue of colonization thus turns into one of resistance and survival. The choice they must make is whether to submit to the forced

settlement and give up their ancestral lands, or whether to rebel against the oppressors and recover their rights and sovereignty. This indicates that both communities' settlements are under scrutiny. When a foreign power attempts to take over their homeland, they are compelled to abandon their roots. They lack the authority and standing to speak out against the injustice done to them. Despite their extreme suffering, they suppress it and move on to the next location.

There is no voice that can stand up to the aristocracies and their authority. Individuals are marginalized, no one takes into consideration their needs, and they depart from their ancestral areas. They both experience the same outcome and it has remained unchanged for both. Therefore, the issue of Settlement, towards which there is no answer, affects both Shabars and Brahmins. To sum up, Mahasweta Devi uses "The Book of the Hunter" to address the issue of settlement while exploring issues of cultural identity, land rights, and opposition to exploitation. The predicament of native tribes that are forcibly displaced and have lost their ancestral lands as a consequence of external exploitation. In this context, "settlement" refers to the struggle of indigenous communities against outside pressures to preserve their customs and connection to their territory.

Devi eloquently captures the strong bond that exists between the tribal groups and their cultural heritage throughout the entire book. These groups' land, customs, ceremonies, and shared memories are all deeply entwined with their sense of cultural identity. Their identity is constructed by generations of shared experiences, beliefs and traditions making it more than just a static construct. It is a dynamic and living entity. The Hunter, a symbol of oppression and foreign exploitation, drives the tribal tribes off their ancestral lands in an effort to weaken and degrade this sense of cultural identity. The Hunter subverts the native people's way of life by using violence, force, and dishonesty to drive them into strange threatening surroundings that lack the cultural symbols that establish their existence.

III. CONCLUSION

The tribal communities in "The Book of the Hunter" show amazing agency and tenacity in maintaining

their cultural identity in spite of these obstacles. As acts of resistance against the encroaching forces of modernization and capitalism, characters such as Kalya and other community members actively proclaim their cultural customs and oppose assimilation. Devi presents a rich and multidimensional picture of cultural identity that draws attention to the paradoxes and complexity that arise during the process of preserving and modifying culture. The tribal communities struggle with internal tensions, generational divides, and the allure of outside influences even as they work hard to uphold their traditions and practices. Devi also looks at how cultural identification interacts with other facets of social and political life, like gender, class, and power relations. Particularly the experiences of women shed light on the manner in which concerns of resistance, exploitation, and patriarchy interact with cultural identity.

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