

# Discourse of Social Marginalization Mahasweta Devi's *Titu Mir*

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to situate the themes of social marginalisation as they are addressed in Mahasweta Devi's *Titu Mir* within a number of interconnected critical areas where the ideologies of dominance are being challenged. It demonstrates the growing exploitation and social exclusion that tribal people face in the postcolonial era. It also makes an effort to show how the Dalit population of the nation, particularly in rural areas, is constantly subjected to various forms of exploitation at the hands of the ruling classes. *Titu Mir* is the story of a subaltern's struggle against the powerful British during the years 1830–1831. It presents an unbiased picture of the exploited and the oppressed in terms of poverty, discrimination, and power politics while highlighting the genuine concerns of the underclass, the have-nots, and the exploited strata of society, which are the sons of soil, the peasants, who play a crucial role in providing food for the entire race of mankind while also being exploited and marginalised.

**Keywords:** Exploitation, Subaltern, Marginalization, Tribals, Discrimination

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Mahasweta Devi is a renowned Bengali writer with an unflinching commitment and leanings towards the marginalized section of society. She has always spoken out against injustice, oppression, and violations of human rights since she is a strong advocate for the poor and the oppressed. She became particularly alert to any form of exploitation, whether it involved outcasts, women, or indigenous people. Her entire body of work is filled with concerns for these ancillary people. Devi writes novels with the intention of being an activist who intervenes in the conflicts between bonded labour, marginalised rural, and tribal people. "Her fiction is her weapon for an actively politicized engagement with the subaltern's struggle" (Vandana's "Aesthetics of Activism: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's Fiction," 197).

Devi's fiction actively engages in the subaltern argument by challenging the mainstream history's monologic authority through a variety of different deconstructive techniques. Her writings challenge the dominant hegemonic portrayal of the power structure, which marginalises and represses the subaltern. Through her artistic creations, which serve as tools for counter-literary and counter-cultural consciousness formation

whereby non-heroes become heroes and specific mythico-historical narratives are freed from their conventional epistemological constraints, Devi contributes to this historical “correction” process.

Devi’s *Titu Mir* is an effort to rewrite an unbalanced, “un-historical history” from the perspective of the disadvantaged. Some chapters in the history of the national movement against imperialism have undoubtedly been overlooked or underwritten. This is particularly true of the role played by indigenous subalterns, who frequently staged rallies against the escalating exploitation of peasants and villagers and continuously contested the expansion of territorial imperialism at the grassroots level. Titu Mir, a peasant leader, led the Narkelberia Uprising (1830–1831) against the British in Bengal, which was one such occasion that highlighted the strength and potential of the underclass. Devi begins her sworn mission of rewriting history by selecting Titu Mir as the subject of her historical fiction with the same name.

In *Titu Mir*, Devi looks into the socioeconomic effects of the Permanent Settlement Act, particularly how it affects regular farmers. Titu Mir’s biography is fictionalised by Devi, who concentrates on the hero’s developing understanding of the scope of the exploitation this Act meant and his conversion to the Wahabi religion following his fortuitous encounter with Syed Ahmad. Such irrational and irrational worries prevented any chance of resistance and reform among a largely ignorant, oppressed people.

The exposure Titu receives in Calcutta, while incarcerated, and while serving Bhudev Pal’s lathial makes him even more sensitive to injustice. Titu already had a temperamental loathing for oppression. He is drawn to Syed Ahmad and the Wahabi faith by the tragic circumstances of his people and his own battle spirit. Titu joins the Wahabi sect as a preacher. However, his struggle encompasses all lower, oppressed classes across all religions and goes beyond the limited confines of his small community. The humble farmers, peasants, potters, and weavers who had endured abuse from the zamindar, planters, and government officials, as well as their agents and middlemen, rally to Titu Mir’s side. Over a vast area surrounding Narkelberia, poor Hindus and Muslims recognise Titu as Emperor.

Devi’s account deliberately draws attention to the fact that Titu didn’t only stand in for one particular religious group; rather, his uprising was one of the oppressed against the oppressors. The conflicts conducted by the dominant/mainstream rulers against British imperialism, which threatened their sovereignty, cannot be equated to Titu Mir’s uprising. The pessimism and desperation of the common people served as fuel for his uprising. Their weapons of war included lathis, spears, unripe wood apples, and bricks. They bravely engaged the empire’s rifles and artillery with them. Titu’s uprising, albeit doomed to fail, demonstrated the resistance

power of the average person. Devi blends tradition, folklore, and legend in *Titu Mir* to retell the tale of a man who has an innate sense of justice and the fortitude to fight against the odds for the rights of the ordinary people. By challenging the denial of their identity in the preeminent historical narratives, the novel appears to serve as a tool to aid in the creation of the subaltern identity.

In Bengal between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, during the British colonial era, *Titu Mir* emphasises sociocultural and historical facets of peasant life. A fascinating account of the peasants' insurgent consciousness, mystic visions, religiosity, and bonds of community can be found in the range of subaltern literature, which includes marginalised people in socioeconomic and political terms in various geographic and historical contexts. Subordination is the connecting factor linking tribals, dalits, and rural landless, women, and immigrant labourers. Additionally, it reveals the genuine nature of peasants' life in colonial India. Due to elitist historiographies' inability to accurately portray the peasants' circumstances and their uprising, the peasants were denied respect as a historical subject. The landlords, moneylenders, and colonial government officials who engaged in political and economic exploitation were the principal targets of the peasant uprisings in colonial India.

A subaltern's account of tyranny and rebellion against the powerful British in the years 1830-1831 is told in *Titu Mir*, for whom he was murdered and given the title of hero. In order to highlight the real concerns of the subalterns, the have-nots, and the exploited strata of society, which are the sons of the soil, the peasants, who play a crucial role in providing food for the entire race of mankind while also being exploited and marginalised, it presents an unbiased picture of the exploited and the oppressed. Devi has acknowledged her interest in the socio-economic history of human evolution and has frequently chosen to write about people who have been nourished by experiencing exploitation and injustice firsthand as well as by sharing the sorrows of their society. She expresses her curiosity with the place of a person in history, which is clear in many of her works, by picking Titu Mir as the topic of this historical fiction. This is the story of the peasants' rebellion, which was organised and fought against wealthy landowners, indigo planters, tax collectors, and moneylenders. It was headed by an uneducated Muslim lad and was considered to be a secular movement by all accounts. These jehadis fought the British guns and batons with traditional weapons like lathis, spears, bows, and arrows. Because Titu created a Bamboo Fort that could house up to 2,000 people at once, he demonstrated that even with limited means, people can band together to fight for justice. A location like this serves as a focal point and a representation of both nationalism and local patriotism.

Titu Mir, a Hyderpur villager and the son of Nisar, fights against oppression and exploitation at the hands of zamindars, indigo planters, white men, and the corporate government. Syed Ahmad has an impact on Titu, leading him to become a Wahabi. Titu was deeply moved by the Wahabi cult, and he spread its teachings in an effort to convert Muslims and prevent the exploitation of the underprivileged by pirs, fakirs, and mendicants. He advocated for freedom and equality, and both Hindus and Muslims respected him for his ability to organise. His supporters admired him for his lack of fear, and they banded together to support him in the struggle for freedom against oppression and unfair extortion by zamindars and others. The oppressors and zamindars, the company's twin pillars of authority, who worked hand in hand with the oppressors, benefited from the Permanent Settlement of Bengal and its infamous Section-7. The business was interested in making money, whether it was done right or wrong. Officials from the police and the company abuse the defenceless villagers. Titu Mir takes offence to this and aids the weavers, small sellers, and other labourers as well as the victims who are peasants.

In *Titu Mir*, Devi accentuates the importance of this religiosity which instigated the consciousness of Titu Mir to not only rid the nation of the oppressors but also cleanse the religion from the distortive customs and rituals. Religious doctrine acts as a uniting as well as dynamic persuader of people, as its tenants are considered to be gospel truths of spiritual justification and claim unassailable veracity. Thus, in enunciating one's attack on discrimination and injustice, the peasants mobilised their stand by means of such an ideology or an ideology which can be regarded as equally powerful. In order to rid the nation of a foreign evil, the peasants moved by their consciousness seemed closer home by exposing and reforming the distortive renderings of their religion first; and then with a strong footing based on a rectified religious ideology, they are empowered to overthrow the suppressor. In perceiving Syed Ahmad's cohesion to this ideology and how he viewed it as a base for attacking the colonial regime, one can notice when he states:

...Company's rule is turning the whole of Hindustan into a land of enemies ranged against each other. That is, why I say, reform the religion, rid this land of the foreigners and raise an army of mujahids to carry out this task... (it will be hence) a declaration of war ...(and due to this) poor Muslims (will) begin to see that it is possible to live without blindly obeying the diktats of these god men, they'll stop being fearful; they'll take heart... (finally Syed Ahmad' fight) has been a crusade for the individual's freedom of worship (reform and consequent empowerment) as well as a revolt of the oppressed against the oppressor (social justice). (62)

In the last line, the urgency of a religious ideology to express one's consciousness looms. Why religion requires reformation is firstly to empower the poor subaltern with a concrete base. Once it has been attained the subaltern can without any suspect believe in the redressed faith and fight for what is right based on an ideology which has been made right. This aspect can be further examined in the novel as Devi recounts the history of factors which ultimately drive to a revolution, factors being – consciousness, consciousness based on religious ideology and finally a consciousness that helps signify a revolution.

In *Titu Mir*, Devi has markedly remarked on it when she writes that only those who has suffered at the hands of the suppressors and realised their pain and agony could be in a position to revolt. In examining the import of these lines, it is obvious that peasant consciousness is born out of an experience of exploitation and the realisation of the same, than imported from someone other than the suppressed. Further, the role of Titu Mir or any peasant leader is to help in the realization than create it. In saying this, this chapter tends to make is attack the views which grant the powerhouses such as nationalist or colonial leaders as the curators of subaltern consciousness. There is a difference in justifying a consciousness and creating one and most of the historic documents gravitate to support the latter. As Devi observes, the consciousness is already ingrained, and what Titu Mir did is show it to the peasants, instead of build, foster, copy-paste one for them. As Partha Chatterjee articulates on the falsification of peasant consciousness, it can be noticed how the native historians as well as colonial historians render consciousness as an external product than a conscious self-expression of the peasant. In criticising the colonial historians, subaltern scholars bring to light how they defended that it is used as a stratagem by the national parties who swindle the peasants to unite with the leaders and overpower the British. While, in criticising nationalist historians, the subaltern scholars manifest how they ignore the peasant the authority of his own consciousness; while asserting that due to the nationalist leaders, the peasants are able to rebel. In both these crabby interpretations, the peasants are easily and most crookedly portrayed as an alien to his own consciousness. It is indicative how such a pressure of history has found itself as reliable documents while the peasants as pioneers of India's freedom struggle, and creator of their own consciousness is nowhere to be heard except in the revolutionary works of the writers and historians.

In the background of Titu Mir's undertaking of peasant revolt, Devi recounts the Sepoy Mutiny and how Titu Mir is a beginning to discern and perceive these repeating discriminations and injustices – all of which are because of the complications between the native elites and the colonial powers. Devi has ardently perceived the impact of these horrible episodes on Titu Mir and how it provoked his consciousness to fight back.

It must not be a revolutionary thought to conceive history of peasant's revolt as a part of Indian history. But it must be viewed as a common established approach of history, if one is to regard the proportion of peasant's revolt, and the logical and extremely pragmatic approaches of subaltern consciousness evidenced; it must be naturally understood to regard such histories as integral part of Indian history. But such is unfortunately not the case, which is stunning to say the least. It provokes one to urge, why such a transgression, to what end, and how could likely a nation call itself illumed if it hinders the most crucial struggles of India namely peasant revolts from its official history. To this effort which is to trigger these questions, find resolutions and unmask the perpetrators, the activists as Devi have interwoven their historical novels.

In *Titu Mir*, Devi draws on history, folklore, and legend to reflect on the role of the indigenous subaltern who persistently resisted territorial imperialism's consolidation at the grassroots level and organised regular protests against the growing exploitation of peasants and villagers through the narration of a single person's and his community's sufferings. One such occasion that honoured the strength and potential of the underclass was the Narkelberia Uprising against the British in Bengal, which was led by the peasant leader Titu Mir. The narrative of Titu Mir starts with his early years and concentrates on the character attributes that made him stand out from his family of small-scale landowners and become a leader of the people. It is clear from the outset of the story that Titu's spirit is too restless to be contained inside the narrow confines of his family. In the story, Titu comes to life as a dynamic leader and a member of a close-knit family.

Titu Mir became known as the poor people's protector and saviour. Titu is a mischievous and reckless child, but he is kind to those in need. He is a daring, brave, and natural leader as a young man who stands up for vulnerable victims against powerful tyrants and their proxies. Royeka Titu Mir finally develops into a dedicated freedom fighter, strong young man, undefeated wrestler, and skilled lathial. "His mother had always hoped that Titu would one day be a highly regarded well to do home holder," says Titu Mir in the passage mentioned in paragraph six. His goal is to bring justice to farmers and punish extortionists and exploiters. He is incredibly strong. His eventual commitment to the Wahabi sect gives his mission the necessary direction. Because Titu Mir despises wealth and uses terrible methods to acquire it, wealthy Muslims and Hindus loathe him despite the fact that they are both impoverished. Devi always empathises with the underprivileged, oppressed, and disadvantaged, which is typical of her style. However, Titu Mir was created with the purpose of helping those who are underprivileged, helpless, oppressed, and exploited.

In *Titu Mir*, Devi brings to light the history of violence in tribal communities, particularly the sexual exploitation of tribal women, and the politics of gender, class, and caste at different levels. In this novel, the abuse and mistreatment of women across the years are examined. She recounts heart-breaking tales of women who were compelled to conform to patriarchal ideologies about traditional womanhood, and she also documents the women's backlash against oppression, which is the means of their possible freedom. Her tribal woman changes herself with the strength of her convictions from a victim to a subject role and brings about metamorphosis in her life after experiencing ongoing degradation caused by physical, mental, and psychic rape at the personal, socioeconomic, and political levels.

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