

## **A STUDY ON THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY IN THE NOVELS OF MAHASWETA DEVI**

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**ABSTRACT:** Status of women in society is very much an issue of controversy. Specifically saying the condition of women belonging to a backward and underdeveloped community has been subjected to various discriminations. The poor, tribal and powerless women have always been at the receiving end. Those sorts of women have always been vulnerable to every kind of discrimination and have hardly got any kind of recognition and respect in society. Distresses faced by them have always been neglected. Injustices inflicted on them have never been addressed with empathy rather those wrongdoings have been termed as natural consequences. It is a fact that every woman does not belong to the strata of society. It is also reality that every woman doesn't undergo the same course of misery but there is always a resemblance in the mourning faced by the women of different background. The stories of Mahasweta Devi highlight the plight; humiliation and sorrow women come across in daily life and also depict the resistance put up by women. The reader of her story gets the clear picture of those issues which have been absent from the periphery of conventional literature. In the fiction of Mahasweta Devi, the representation of women is intended to show the gruesome economic, physical and social exploitation incurred on women to gratify the interest of some greedy abuses.

**Keywords:** Distress, discrimination, powerless, Society, Women etc.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The trajectory of exploitation and subjugation experienced by vulnerable women has been multilayered and winding. Those women are considered to be marginalized who live in the borderline where they are subjected to every kind of discrimination and exploitation. It is a well-known fact of the reality that in most of the disempowered women face gender discrimination for their gender, class, and caste; unfortunately, those women have no presence in the gaze of mainstream society. Another highly depressing fact is that those women are often deprived of the right to freedom which is the basic necessity of every human being. Sometimes the brutal tortures meted out to women are considered to be social norms.

## **FEMALE IDENTITY AND SUBJECT FORMATION**

Constraints of society are the determinants of the boundary constructed for women authors. It is generally perceived that art form like literature has a very significant role to play in evaluating the oppression in political and social forms foisted on women. But surprisingly the same art form finds no acceptance when it is used by a women author to describe the various structures of violence and injustice experienced by women at home, in marital life and even in the condition of maternity. The idea behind that is to subjugate the tone which assaults the very basis of the hypocrisies of the conventional society. The restriction imposed on the women is the result of the attitude of a patriarchal society which always wants to raise discipline on women organization. To accomplish this first step is to make the women nonexistent. The class divisions of society are very much helpful for organizing such type of immoral activity. The segregation of women in the public sphere is legalized by the elimination of women in the private sphere. Discrimination doesn't stop there but the categorization of women becomes stark when a woman enters public life. There the art of writing is found. The very expression of writings through literature is not only a means of identity and empowerment but also the symbol of resistance, insolence, and bravery which empowers the voice of women.

In the art of literature, women have exclusive space for them. The much-needed space, which has always been weakened and distorted by the various social customs. Though within the various constraints women have raised their voice in various situations and these situations discovers the numerous potential of women. It was found that sometimes women author

particularly reveals the matter needed for change. By dint of the creativity, the author presents the unknown facts of private domains which affect the public domain.

Construction of female character or portraying a female in the lead role is a difficult task because in most of the cases it is found that female raconteur narrates the story through her character. The voice of the narrator and the voice of the author get mixed due to social circumstances. That suggests the voice of the protagonist has been influenced by social norms. Mostly the stories penned by the woman author are the reflections of her personal experiences. Some writings become the device of raising the concerns of their personal experiences and establishing their identity. Consequently, such protagonists surely forecast the vision of the author. Simultaneously the storyteller narrates the condition of women in her surroundings and beyond as is perceived by her. Thus the development of the storyline becomes the reversal process between the narrator and protagonist.

The stories of Mahasweta Devi not only depicts the situation of her atmosphere but they also respond to the concerns of those women who are vulnerable to insecurities. Those stories narrate the stories of those marginal women who are non-existent in the mainstream of society. In order to construct a proper storyline, Mahasweta Devi explores remote places mostly inhabited by tribal. Her sole objective is to get a clear picture of the living conditions of the most primitive subjects of Indian society. She has also formed and guides some organizations with the tribal people to resist the dominance of injustice. While travelling such places she gets the opportunity to establish a connection with the people on the ground and that experience also helps her to understand the actual ground level condition which gives birth to the discipline of subaltern studies.

According to Vandana the reporting of Mahasweta Devi on the mistreatment and expropriation of the tribal people raises the issue of those people whose concerns are the focal point of her fictions. Accordingly, the act of raising the concerns of the subdued people becomes the matter of subject formation. It clarifies the act of taking the concerns of those defenceless tribal women to the authority and also who is taking into account their concerns as her own concern. The literary works of Mahasweta Devi is a highly effective weapon to put up a resistance against the exploitation of tribal people by the higher caste and especially for the helpless women. Her works invalidate the entire conventional notion of caste biased and the exploitation of women. In this context, exploitation means the objectification and the commercial

use of the female body. She took up the issue of tribal women who are subjugated by various socio-economic means. The abysmal condition of those women is being used to incur benefits on other individuals. Sometimes brutal torture is also meted out to them for catering the interests of others.

The view of M.N.Chatterjee is worth mentioning. He thinks women possess more strength than men. But in the lower strata of the society, the distresses increase not only because of their economic condition but also for their physical features. As a result, they are subjected to multiple exploitations. It is not a matter of surprise that in most of the cases of atrocities committed against the women it was found that they were victims of lustful male abusers.

Female characters in a story are open to various elucidations. As for Dhouli the lead character of Dhouli reveals the circumstantial outcomes of tribal customs. Dhouli became expectant because of Misrilal who was from upper caste but Misrilal did not pay heed to her condition and one day eventually left her. Afterwards, when she forced to opt for prostitution for earning livelihood it was Misrilal who was the chief architect of imposing a social boycott on her panchayat was called to expel Dhouli from the village so that she doesn't get the scope to practice prostitution in that village. When Dhouli was leaving the village her mother pleaded her to stay with the brother in law of Misrilal because he had silently offered her to be his personal object of physical pleasure in return Dhouli would receive the permission to live in that village. Dhouli rejected the offer. Why do Dhouli did it? The reason behind this was Dhouli's situation in the village deteriorated because of her profession. In addition to that, she can't legally marry Misrilal so her condition in the village was quite unbearably humiliating.

## **FEMALE SELF AND BODY AS A SIGHT OF ABJECTION**

The talk on the female body is difficult to carry on in a condition where marginalized defenceless women can't raise their own concern. They are also deprived of the right to own their body. This is very true when women are treated as an object of business dealings. The conversation doesn't end in black and white but also provides some grey area for arguments. In the stories of Mhasweta Devi, we come across a variety of women cutting across the barrier of class caste and creed. From the women of tribal society to the women of the upper class and caste in her story, every kind of women gets her space. The stories depict how every sort of women faces the wrath

of patriarchy. She portrays the fact that how women are seen only as a tool of reproduction and the consents of women have no significance in the psyche of patriarchy.

*The Second Sex* of Simon De Beauvoir assists us to evaluate the situation of women. According to her men believe that it is the best for society to keep women in a state of dependence, so the code of law had also been set against her to establish the women as others. The very idea of othering women is a part of the culture that believes women should not raise their voice rather they should always remain an object for the male which can be exploited willingly.

In the story of *Breast Giver*, Mahasweta Devi narrates the story of subaltern women named Jashoda. Jashoda has been appointed by Halder family as a professional mother. Jashoda took the job after her husband Kanagalicharon met a fatal accident. She accepted the job to support her family. She was depicted as a deity because of her Brahmin Identity (Spivak) but ultimately her place in the family underwent a change as she failed to continue the job. As a result, she started getting the treatment of maid in the family. She didn't remain in the position of the goddess. In this story, she was the breastfeeder to help the maintenances of the figure of the wives of Halder family (Spivak). The whole scenario is quite ironic that Jashoda is sacrificing her own figure just for getting a little amount of food. The whole story expresses how the reproductively of a subaltern woman is preserved for some economic benefits. The idea has been argued by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Such type of sale of motherhood just reverses the sexual class division of labour between man and woman.

Above all, in this story, the bare financial exploitation of the female body has been highlighted. According to her, a female body is always subjected to economic exploitation which is carried out in many forms. A woman is always subdued in every type of entity. She could be subjected to exploitation as a mother, sister, and wife. The womb of a woman is also a means of producing economic benefits.

## **FEMALE SELF AND BODY AS SIGHT OF RESISTANCE**

Status of women can always be compared to matchbox. a matchbox may be capable of setting entire Lanka ablaze because it has gunpowder as its constituents. Though in kitchen, bedroom matchboxes are always found lying humbly. Case of the women is also similar they may possess

the power of damaging everything but they are always found in a very passive form in every sphere of life.

### ***Women as women***

In *Draupadi*, *Draupadi* or *DopdhiMehjan* is a rebellion and activist. Both she and her husband had a significant role in the revolutionary movement of India (Naxalite Movement). They participated actively in the Operation Bakuli in 1971 the government had issued a warrant against them so they went underground. Dopdi the lead character of the story was hiding from the police but one day police nabbed her. Two renegades of their organization had worked as a traitor and they were caught. But the question is what made Dopdi so important? Devi represents the character as the opposite of the character portrayed in Mahabharata. In the text, Draupadi had five husbands. That explicitly states the case of polyandry in the epic as argued by Spivak. but the example of Draupadi is restricted to only religious life, not in practical life. Her first husband had pawned her in the dice game. That actually shows the fact that a lady is an object that can be exchanged in the context of trade. It also reflects the fact that her presence has no real value, so the head of the opponent could get the chance to destroy her respect by forcing her to strip. But the wicked head of the enemy camp failed to do this because of the intervention of lord Krishna. That story symbolizes the concept of upper caste where God will always be there to save her.

There is no God to save her. She was inhumanly gang-raped and abandoned casually on the floor. After sometime when Senanayak wanted to talk to her she went ahead naked. Her bare body in front of her made the Senanayake very much uncomfortable. When he told her to wear clothes Dopdi refused to wear cloth and replied that cloth was useless for her as she is not ashamed of any man. Her bare body represents the strength of the marginalized that prevented the Senanayake to move forward. What is the reason behind this contradictory illustration? In the epic lord, Krishna saved Draupadi but in real life, nobody arrived to save Dopdi. Rather her bare body made the notion of male supremacy ashamed. She represented both the marginalized and woman. Being a woman she became the dynamic agent of protest even at the cost of her body. She also raised the alternative voice of marginalized. It is undeniable that Arijit has decided the course of her action. It was only she who stood against the Senanayake. The depiction of Dopdi not only represents the rebellious entity of woman but it also shakes the very foundation of the thought process of Indian history.

***Women as Mother***

This portion addresses the issue of the mother. The question is related to the marginalized entity of motherhood. In what form a mother can be marginalized? Or is a mother's action questionable in the context of marginalization? Or does the physical feature of the mother have any relevance in the discussion of the topic? The embedded difference between motherhood and the idea of motherhood is drawn by Mhasweta Devi depicts by juxtaposing the emotions of motherhood and the structured idea of motherhood. Those works divulge how the notion of traditional motherhood can frequently prevent the collective attempt to restrict women within the boundary of a socially acknowledged periphery. Simultaneously denying them some basic rights and needs. The vulnerability has always been a part of the life of women irrespective of their entity of mother, sister and wife. Mahasweta Devi elucidates the matter while describing women both as goddess and mother very precisely. In the story of "Sindhubala", Sindhu Bala has been depicted as dark-skinned with a bulging forehead and snub nose. But her feet are considered to be highly auspicious by her mother as it entered the world first. Radha Chakravarty is of the opinion that the story reveals the anger of a woman who was compelled to play the role of a divine lady. She was called by the other people to save the lives of their children. But eventually, she had to sacrifice her own mental and physical desires.

There was another issue in her life that was her physical appearances. Hence she was not beautiful in a conventional gaze so she was considered to be a burden for her family. After some time she got married to Sanneshi the marriage did not last long. After having been rejected by her husband she thought herself to be a kind of outcast. Her possession of supernatural power also contributed to such type of idea. This idea was first devised by her mother Manudasi. The only intention of Manudasi was to earn a decent earning for having a better life. The plan worked for a long time but eventually, Sindhubala that goddess-like behaviour has some consequences. This very divine approach is standing upon the idea of hollow. She wanted to become a normal human being. She was eager to become a mother, the mother of a normal child. But her sterile body won't allow her to fulfil her dream. She was incapable of giving birth to a child biologically. This unbearable truth was the other matter or a matter of contention; as a result, she was not even allowed to ponder over it. The story of her divine feet was also a way of earning livelihood for her family. That is also another aspect of exploitation. That was clear exploitation

of the female body. Her prevailing conditions made her more resistant. Truly speaking the whole idea of supernatural power was based upon the sense of self-denial of mothering.

## **CONCLUSION**

The stories of Mahasweta Devi provide a voice to the defenceless vulnerable women. The literary work by her explains in detail the gruesome exploitation and inhuman abuses of the female body. After studying the research it can be presumed that marginalized women sometimes exercise some sorts of power within a controlled periphery. The power is subdued and in some cases, the power is just destructed like the body of women. Women possess power in many forms that have also been depicted by Mahasweta Devi with utmost precision.

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