

Exploring psychological resistance of women in Mahasweta Devi's Fictions: Under the Impact Of Feminism

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Abstract

Onus of feminist literature is to divide and create a broad field of study for marginalized and women. Traditionally, women have been considered as a secondary status in patriarchal social structure. Women have not been able to maintain a position of superiority in society, and women try to raise her voice against outrageous corruption, then this society tries to subdue her voice. Much study has been done, but on ground level, yet society is not free from these systems. This paper aims to explore compelling narratives of Mahasweta Devi's selected works. Through her writing she occupied such a unique socio-political space within her in literary culture. The Indian constitution provides law of equality, freedom and justice to each citizen of India. But the question is that are women aware of that laws? This study highlights the discrimination of Dalit women and violations of human rights in Bengal and other states of India. Women attacked by society on basis of sex, gender and race.

Keywords: patriarchal, prevail, outrageous, oppressed, human rights.

Introduction

The identity of women in the social structure is intricately tied to words of resistance, oppression, and survival. Often female seeks to control and repress other female desires. The patriarchal system explores violence, exploitation, and subjugation. As Mary Wollstonecraft remarks, "Women are, therefore, to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men" (Wollstonecraft, Rights of women). Mill believed that, "the liberty of the individual is absolutely necessary for the development of the society" (Mill, Women, P.13). Women are exploited and victimized because of their gender and sex.

Bengal literature has an eminent culture and tradition. The genre of Bengali literature was translated by different writers, and has a profound impact on Indian literature. Mahasweta Devi

was a social activist and a great writer of Bengal literature. She has received master's degree in English from "Shantineketan" an experimental university founded by Poet Rabindranath Tagore. She wrote more than hundred novels, mostly books have been written in her native language of Bengali. Mahasweta Devi had intimate connection with tribal communities that allowed her to know grassroots-level issues. Her personal experiences show in her writing. Her language is very simple and ironic to the complexity of local issues of tribal and women. Through, her simple and ironic writing, she touches emotions of readers and make them aware of complex realities of feudal society. She was a keen observer of patriarchal and feudal system of society. She had a strong bond with lower sections of society, and she was well aware of the problems of their life. Marginalized group have to bear the brutality of elite class. They had to live their life according to the wishes of elite class. Her short story 'Draupadi' relates to the incident of our society, for instance the rape case of Calcutta and incident of Manipur reminds me the story of Draupadi. This is a big slap on our global cultured society. Are we cultured? A doctor lady on her duty is not safe, so how can we make assure a Dalit section of society. Lower sections are treated badly by society as polluting and polluted. Dalit women are most voice less victim in society. They oppressed twice for being Dalit for being poor women.

Rape Abduction

Rape has been a deadly weapon against women, which represents in the story of 'Draupadi'. Physically rape happens once but victim rape mentally till her last breath. The digital space and social media has become a source of online harassment, bullying and sexual exploitation (Jain 2020). Psychologically women have broken after rape and she has to face mean concept of society. There is need of change in thinking of society, we must help victim rather than blame her. She allowed women to fight with circumstances and be mentally strong and she proved through her stories. Last line of story presents power of her soul:

"Draupadi pushes the Senanayak with her two mangled breasts for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid"(Devi's,Maps,77.)

Draupdi is a name of the central character in story. There are two version of her name Dopdi and Draupdi: her proper Sanskrit name is Draupdi, but she has not dare to pronounce her own name because she belongs to santhal tribal community. The patriarchy society cannot accept her in the form classical Draupdi. She is on a list of wanted persons, yet her name is not on the list of appropriate names for the tribal women. Because of her Santhal tribe of Bengal, she does not consider as a part of main stream of Indian society. The social structure never accept her as a human being, thus occupies lowest rank in a class based society. Devi divided story into four parts, in the first two parts she is fighting shoulder to shoulder with her husband for their rights as a loyal wife. But In the third section of the story we find there is a fight of a women against male oppression, and in the conclusion we see a strong character in the form of Dopdi, and she faces bravely senanayak without fear. White color is symbol of purity and innocence, and her

white clothes are contrast with Dopdi,s black body . Here she is not victim but equal to men who fights for her rights. Dopdi is raped repeatedly, they left her keep bleeding, the next morning, they are offer her clothes to cover her body, in real they are try to cover their deeds by clothes. After raped she is not ready to cover herself, because she has nothing to cover from this double standard society.

The second story discusses in this paper is ‘Rudali’, this novel is a critique of the feudal and patriarchal system of society. Here Devi presents the hypocrisy of elite class. In whole story death has been represented as the crucial event in the life of Rudali and elite class. There are also glimpses of psychological transformation of women in her novel. Through Sanichari Devi tries to show financial and social crises of their life, but all problems cannot prevent them to move on in life.

Devi explores psychological expression of women. Speaking about herself, the source of her inspiration she says: “I have always believed, that the real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across reappearance in various forms of folklore, ballads, myths and legends carried by ordinary people across generation. The reason and inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used, and yet do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazing, noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw material else where once I have started knowing them? Sometimes it seems to me that my writing is really their doing.”(Devi, p.77).

Mahasweta Devi ‘s creative writing is a source of activism and social movements against negative consequences of government policies and liberalization. Her works are about social and economic inequalities and discrimination. Her works are highlight how liberal polies are lead to inequality and exploitation? Displacement of tribal communities from their ground and different resources, that can erode the cultural identities and traditional ways of life of tribal and Dalit women.

Gaytri Chakrovarty Spivak is a scholar, feminist theorist, and a literary critic has earned an international identity through her intellectual property and she accumulated practical experiences of different culture, like United State and India. Her experiences are relating to the development of multicultural studies and feminist theory. She talks about international feminism that will provide equal justice to voices of Global feminism. She is also known for the translation of Mahasweta Devi’s tale “Draupadi.” This translation stands Mahasweta Devi among western readers and at the international platform. This is not possible to understand Mahasweta Devi’s writing influence in world literature, without mentioning Gaytri Chakrovarti Spivak. She played a crucial role in Mahasweta Devi’s writing treasure, by her translation of Devi’s many works. Her translation shows the social-political context of postcolonial literature and gender studies. In the part of introduction Spivak explores the character of senanayak, through this she describes :

“I translated this Bengali short story into English as much for the sake of its villain, Senanayak , as for its title character, Draupadi(or Dopdi). Because in Senanayak I find the closet approximation to the First-world scholar in search of the Third World, I shall speak of him first.”(Spivak, pp.381).

Third World Feminism

Third world feminism explores experience of women in underdeveloped countries. This started in the period of 1970s and 1980s. This movement was about the universalizing women’s issues and concern how women oppressed, ignored on the basis of class, race, and sex. Western feminism did not attain the problems of colonial women and they are underprivileged and still fighting for basic needs. Both places could not be compared because western had power of knowledge and politics. Women of third world have not courage to speak for themselves. Ranjoo Seodu claims in her essay: “ought to be reclaimed to promote inclusive and democratic feminism that accommodate diverse and multiple feminist perspectives of third world women on the ground”. (Ranjoo,S.Feminism,p.1-30). Gaytry Chakrovarti Spivak wrote a book ‘Can Subaltern Speak?’ The purpose of writing this book to forced intellectual class to speak for them. They do not have courage to speak for themselves. She declares that subaltern cannot speak. Spivak declares in her essay “The Politics Of Translation” (2000): “My relationship with Mahasweta Devi is easygoing I am able to say to her: I surrender to you in your writing, is another kind of surrender. Surrendering to the text in this way means, most of the time, being literal.”(Spivak,pp.321). Spivak translates her text, which is different from translation perspective. As a feminist write Devi is related to marginalized, but all women writers are not feminist. Mahasweta Devi was a writer of all victims of society, She regards herself a humanist than a feminist writer. Spivak writes in her essay:

“A woman writer who is wittingly or unwittingly a “feminist”-and of course all woman writers are not “feminist” even in this broad sense”. (Spivak, pp.316). She finds that women are still marginalized in a setup of democracy. Translation was not her field but she moved to translation because, is a best medium in intercultural communication.

Concept of strong women

Firstly, we have to understand the meaning of strong women, naturally woman are soft, symbol of love and sacrifice. Women fit perfectly in each role of society as mother, wife or care taker, but she considers secondary status in social frame. Emotionally God has created women much strong than men, but patriarchal system is not able to accept her as a strong personality. Women were always on the side of disadvantages. They perform to take care of the whole family and spent their life in the household of kitchen. Devi presents new kind of strong image of women

through her short stories. Despite of much social and political development of society, the condition of women are not satisfying. Indian constitution saves women by different laws, but all women are not aware of their rights. The nature of state and central government have always been very patriarchal and powerful for downtrodden and Dalit women. The lower class and women have been kept out of the limits of power. Rich landlords and administrative bodies are trying to cheat their rights and remain them in darkness.

Character of 'draupadi' is a complex and willed, who is determine to overcome the obstacles of her life. Despite all challenges, Dopdi remains silent and strong. Draupadi is a story about a women who raises her voice against the feudal system of India and ingratitude of Indian government. Dr, Suman Ahlawat in her journal, "The psychological exploration of women in Mahasweta Devi" observes,that feminism is not about rights and freedom of women, is necessary for recreating societal harmony. Women has right to achieve the same legal protections and professional opportunities as male achieve. Draupadi is an incarnation of 'Draupadi' of epic Mahabharata. But the Draupadi of Mahabharata was a princess of epic, and she was safe there was a lord Krishna for saving her chastity, but there is no god. Now women have to become her own God for herself.

Through her writing Devi explores the shocking realities of social and politics that happen behind the curtain. Her both stories 'Draupadi' and 'Rudali' have a theme of exploitation. Devi presents a transformation in her characters, in starting of novels her heroines are very oppressed, poor but at last they become symbol of power and inspiration for other women. This is the best quality of her writing. 'Draupadi' asked question in terrifying voice "What,s the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" Senanayak commanded the policeman and went for dinner ,and all night Draupadi was raped by policeman. Draupadi approached senanayak with her hand on her hip laughing. She transforms emotionally strong though she was abused physically. She said "you asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?" (Spivak,p.402).

The second story which concerned in this paper is 'Rudali' translated by Anjum katyal, Rudali is an ironic tale of exploitation, struggle and survival. In 1992, it was adapted into a play by Usha Gagually, a leading theatre director of Calcutta. Kalpana Lajmi,s multiple award winning film Rudali is also based on the same short story by Mahasweta Devi. What is Rudali ? The tear sellers of Rajasthan. Rudalis are mourning women, in Rajasthan there have been traditionally hired to weep at the death of male relatives in the royal families of the state. This story also shows the double standard hypocrisy of the rich landlord, who would spent huge amount on the funeral of their near and dear. This is the source of competition among rich people to show off their wealth at funeral ceremony. Rudalis are celebrate the death of elite class, and they make money by tears. This ritual has become the source of their income. Ironically this story presents

the brutal reality of our society, there is a big lesson of life that they have to survive in darkest time of life. Dulna expresses before Sanichari and Bhikni, that stomach is more than anything in this world. The world of poor is different from the world of wealthy. They can exaggerate moral, good, sin, or bad, but we have only concern our stomach. He advises them to become rudalis. Bhikni asks "Are there no family members to weep for him? And Dulna counters with, "Only the families of the poor mourn their death. The rich households have to hire mourners." (Katyal, pp.40).

Rudali is a feminist text, but Mahasweta Devi is rejecting the idea that Rudali can be associated with feminism. As Anjum Katyal describes in her translation of Rudali that "For you it may be important that this story is written by a woman.... Another woman has adapted it into a play.... But I think that a writer has written a story, a director has adapted it into a play.....When I write I never think of myself as a woman."(Katyal, pp. 16)

This story teaches the philosophy of life, one has to sustain even in the worst period of life and face the circumstances of life. The character of Dulna in Rudali learns them how to deal with life, and they do better in their worst period of life. By the time Sanichari and Bhikni learn from the experiences of life, and they accept their circumstances. They have become professional rudalis. Sanichari has no tears on the death of her husband, but now she sheds tears for others. In Indian culture women are worshipped but at the same time they face harassment, rape, sexual abuse and other crimes against women. Devi has been described these crimes through her different literary works. Mahasweta Devi in her literary works has dealt directly with women's position in this male-dominated society, and their relationship with the administrative body. Devi has rewritten novels on theme of tribal and womanhood with the help of iconic historical figures like Sita, Draupadi, Jashoda, and others. She picked characters from stories of ancient India, and she relates them with the problems of modern women. Mahasweta Devi's works are dedicated to all weaker who are the victims of the patriarchal and feudal system of society. Her writing is journalist by nature, and represents the actual reality of class section. Mahasweta Devi's stories are best source of inspiration for voiceless marginalized. After deep observation of her stories I can say that woman of each class has to restore power against male dominated structure.

Apparently, Mahasweta Devi explores Naxalbari movements, women, dalit, but she deals with multiple dimensions she removes curtain from the official bodies of government because they just exploit normal people on the name of law and rules. Lack of education makes them stronger because people have no courage to ask questions. Acceptance of everything leads a society towards crime and corruption. Through Draupadi and Sanichari Mahasweta Devi opens new horizon for weaker section of society. Her narratives are present a new image of strong woman, because they are not ready to adjust according the wishes of elite class. Her point of view is to change the mentality of class consciousness.

Discussion

Devi's writing is a unique combination of social activism and literature. She was a dominating face in contemporary literature. The present study deals with Devi's effective literary works. Her both works 'Draupadi' and 'Rudali' are an ironic narratives of survival that revolve around life of Dalit women, and tell about their pain and struggle. Despite of much development, yet India is not free from exploitation of women. She represents women have secondary status in patriarchal society. Gaytri chakrovarty Spivak narrates in her translated version of 'Draupadi': "Shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eyes...She's been made up right...How many? Four-five-six-seven-then Draupadi has passed out."(Devi,1978/1981).Devi depicts, that the body of Dopdi is an object for the force, through brutality they want to make her mute, but that was big mistake. Because their brutality has become boon for her, and she turned into a powerful personality.

Mahasweta Devi represents the psychological expression of women in her works. In the beginning part of her novels characters seem depressed, meek and oppressed, but after sometime there is change in expression. They take stand for themselves, and become a source of inspiration for others. This transformation of her characters explore the harsh reality of society, because Devi had intimate connection with tribals, that allowed her to know grass roots-level issues. She does not accept weak image of women that is why her each work presents women inner power which covered by society on the name of caste, Dopdi, who threatens the masculine of her oppressors by refusing to be ashamed of her mutilated body. The paper critically investigates the psychologically expression of women during different phase of their life, and try to find a better social structure for women. Maha sweta Devi says:

"I often say that my world is divided between two things- the needful and needless. I am interested only in the former. I do not have much use for the needless."(Devi, Introduction).

Each woman deserves these rights for the best use of her capacity. In Hindu culture women considered as Goddess, and worshiped, but at the same time they face harassment, rape, sexual abuse and other crimes against women. But in reality she needs respect more than worship. Let her be human being make her free from all kind of chains. Development of a nation depends on women, so it is essential to create secure and healthy atmosphere for all citizens of country.

Conclusion

Mahasweta Devi has justified local characters and their way of life, her protagonists are generally come from lower and oppressed social arena, but they fight for equality and justice. This paper discussed the image of women through Devi's selected works. Devi explored Bengali literature, and she had enriched depositaries of Bengali literature with her best works.

Devi's text showed the patriarchal nature of society where tribal women were raped multiple times, and they are subject of fantasy. The administrative machinery stands for rich landlords not with poor tribal women. Devi brought two subaltern women from same background, they had same problems. Her characters are not 'silenced-subalterns' rather she creates a strong image of woman who can stand up for herself, and refuses to be subjugated by sickened society. Development of family and nation is depends on woman so it is essential to create a secure and healthy atmosphere, right of equality and opportunity can ensure better democratic system.

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