

Conflict of the Unheard Voices: A Study of Mother of 1084

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Abstract – In this age of hyper-active awareness, there are some chances for an issue to be lost in the limelight of some highly discussed issues but being an important and stubborn torch bearer in the pan-Indian literary world, Mahasweta Devi does not allow any of the ideas that she observes in the society to be highlighted to lose it in the obscurity, merely because it is not much discussed by the majority of the writers. Mahasweta Devi in her play Mother of 1084, takes a view on a complex issue, conflict in human heart whether to go with intense human feelings or to go with much trodden path of pragmatic wisdom which kills human feelings in the name of discipline, peace and order. Mahasweta Devi aptly presents the picture of dilemma way of life and basic human kindness. Mahasweta Devi, a social activist, is one of the most noted Bengali writers of this century. Her works often contain what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls “Problematic representations of our society.” Her writings are concerned with many grass roots level social movements around the question of bonded labor, persisting feudalism in rural polity, state negligence etc. Mother of 1084 is a dramatization of Mahasweta’s Bangla novel Hajar Chaurashir Ma, in which she provides a documentation of the Naxalite movement of the seventies. The Naxalites raised their voice against the established order, and fought for the cause of the poor, exploited by the landlords, industrialists and bureaucrats. In the battle between Naxalites and establishment many young people are killed and thus leaving their mothers, wives and sisters destitute.

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Set in the urban Bengal, the play realistically portrays the climactic phase of the annihilation of the leaders of the masses and its aftermath during 1970s. Sujata Chatterjee, the protagonist, is one of those victims whose kith and kin had been done away with in a confrontation with the people in power. In fact, with Sujata, the playwright seeks to bring to light the darker areas of life where the persecution of the innocent continues unabated. Having felt alienated from her corrupt household, Sujata takes up a job in the bank. Although it is two long years since Brati was killed, her mind is filled with his memories. Not unusually, at times, Sujata tries to find a fulfillment in his death which she has never dared to aim for herself.

Brati, the younger son of Sujata, like other youth, disillusioned with the present social system—a system that harbors many evils which thrive on the gullibility of the innocent people, responds accordingly to the off with revolt in the rural West Bengal and spread to the metropolis the urban intelligentsia, out of sense of remorse, decides to take part in it “for their guilt in acquiescing in the perpetuation of a system of exploitation from which they had reaped benefits for generations.”

Like Sujata, Brati has no fancy for the luxuries that their rich background is to offer. Being aware of economic deprivation and exploitation, he swears by

the cause of the exploited. And he revolts against the senseless ethics of all those institutions that add to the woes of the underdog. It is, however, unexpected of a person like him who is a member of a family which has been built on the mound of corruption which touches the play with a ‘mix of the elements of surprise, innocence and youth imminent in life and history.

It is indeed surprising that Sujata, with an innate resentment, like her favorite son, against all the shams that are inherent in the patriarchal institution, fails to take cognizance of the rising tide of revolt in Brati. Thus, Sujata, is caught in the conflict within herself between a sympathetic mother and a silent protester against the immoral life which her household stands for this conflict assumes an altogether different form when her motherly love is contrasted with the indifference of the members of her family towards the news of Brati’s death which the play begins. Sujata feels suffocated under the weight of the stifling values enjoined on her by the patriarchal institution. Yet she never ventures to disentangle herself from them. She is aware of her husband’s womanizing and corrupt practices, but she says nothing against him. Rather she tries to escape all the constraints by taking up a job in the bank. Though at times she resents the immoral acts of her children, she continues to discharge her familial duties bearing calmly all kinds of

humiliations. She is very fond of her youngest son. But unlike her other children is a man of integrity. She appears to find in his company what she misses in her household.

Ironically, however much they value each other's feelings Sujata does not know enough about Brati's activities. It is only with the help of others that she learns what he is really made of. As a matter of fact her first meeting with Nandini, an activist and faithful follower of Brati, provides Sujata with an insight into a part of her son's life that she had never known. And she realizes how he risked his life by staying back home on his birthday to honour her sentiments. "Otherwise," says Nandini, "he should have left for the base on the fifteenth" (25) and escaped death.

Nandini, "It's a deadly time when people do not belong to one another by virtue of kinship or ties of blood. Everyone remains a stranger these days to every other one. It's a crime to allow this to persist. It's an obligation these days to know one's son" (24). This is the voice of angry young woman crippled by the police torture. Her unwavering faith in human dignity is inspiring Nandini says, "How can you be so smug and complacent? With so many young men killed, so many imprisoned, how can you wallow in your complacency? It's your "all's right with the world, let's go on nicely" that frightens me most" (29-30).

These words seem to be not only for Sujata but in larger context these are for the audience and the whole society. These words are to evoke humanity in us. These words are voice of Nandini and Sujata against the corrupt and rigid society. So many people are murdered between the conflict of Naxals and Establishment. Somu and Brati are the instances of such murders. But these murders shatter the life of poor's. Somu's mother says:

"They wouldn't even take down his complaint. They didn't do a thing. They only sent their vans when it was all over to collect the dead bodies... They didn't do a thing. That was more than he could bear, and he died of the shock. O God! No justice? He went on and can asking till he was dead." (19)

Having lost thus the last bread-winner in the family, many mothers and sisters has given themselves up to despair. Their social position is pathetic, painful and even heart-rending. Sujata goes through a painful process of discovering Brati and her own being while others in the family including Dibyanath, the father, overtly a part of the Establishment that cause Brati's death.

Besides, the Establishment is all set to eliminate the leaders of the masses. The agents like Anindya, one-time associate of Brati and Saroj Pal, a "bloody cur of the police" (9) carry out its orders in exchange for handsome rewards. Saroj Pal, an archetype of bureaucracy, surpasses all those persecutors have come to stay in our memory by virtue of their

notorious description of the interrogation scene, in which he adopts cruel techniques to elicit information from Nandini, is realistic.

And the play ends with Sujata exhorting the audience that is people, not to be silent sufferers, but respond actively to the reality and the cause. She knows it is a common cause in which she has merged her 'self':

Why don't you speak? Speak, for heaven's sake, speak, speak,

speak! How long will you endure it in silence? Where is the

place where there's no killer, no bullets, no prison, no vans?

. . . Where can you escape it all . . . in Calcutta, in West

Bengal, from north to south, from east to west? (35)

Here it is the voice of a universal protest against the seemingly immovable and heartless society in which we live. And, by the time she makes this stirring appeal to the audience, Sujata shakes herself off the shackles of the patriarchal values enjoined on woman. Enlightened, she takes up cudgels against the society itself. /Symbolically, Sujata moves from the world of innocence to the world of experience. As a result, she discovers inside herself a wish for self-realization has been so far suppressed due to the lack of courage. Nivedita sen and Nikhil Yadav rightly say, "Devi's oeuvre largely comprises stories around contemporary social and political stories, a majority of which span a reasonably free time rane in independent India" (14).

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