

# Mahasweta Devi Novels Marginalization on Oppression Cultural Imperialism

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**Abstract - Mahasweta Devi is one of those contemporary writers who deals with all these forms of oppression in her work. What distinguishes Mahasweta Devi from other writers, both male and female, is the zeal of activists in her writings, representing her involvement in the problems of the underprivileged. It gives voice to the voiceless by exposing the different forms of oppression inherent in Indian society and also fighting for their rights. Mahasweta Devi 's approach to oppression is unique, because while most women writers deal with the gender oppression of middle-class or upper-class women, Devi deals with the issue of gender oppression embodied within their class and caste dichotomies. Her activist writings, in the form of essays, short storeys, plays and novels, explore the trident forms / patterns of oppression — class, caste, and gender oppression.**

**Keywords: Class, Caste, and Gender Oppression**

## INTRODUCTION

### AUTHORITARIANISM IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S WORKS

Differences of caste, faith, religion, sex, and social and economic hierarchies can be traced to the history of oppression. Due to their low economic status and the colour of the skin, Indians from the primaevial era were exploited. During British rule the prejudicial degradation reached its peak. The myriad problems caused by religious differences, unequal land ownership, the caste issues and social positions allowed the economically poor to be further exploited. The power was transferred to the higher classes / castes by ownership of property. The barrier between the upper and lower classes was broadened further because the former applied their own rules and forced them on to use them both religiously and culturally. This led to a divided society consisting of the deprived, privileged, landowners, landless men and excluded women in the family.

Originally the word "caste" was linked to India's traditional system of legacy and rigidly stratified classes from every social group with common features, such as rank, wealth or profession. In Latin *castus* the term has found roots, it is believed, meaning "purity" or "morally pure." The word arrives in English via the Portuguese *casta*, which means "race" or "linearity," which first became known as the Hindu social stratification system in the 1700s. "Caste is a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, claiming common descent from a mythic ancestor, human or divine, professing to be in the

same hereditary calling and being regarded by the people who are competent to give opinions as one single person. Sir Herbert HPE Risley is a British ethnographer and has studied extensively concerning the tribes and castes. Sir Herbert The name is typically a specific occupation or associated with it. A caste is almost always endogamous because a member of one large circle, married not outside but within a circle by a common name. Usually, there is a number of smaller circles, each of which is also endogamative ("The caste system" 12).

The caste system has different characteristics. First of all, one could mention the segmental division of society into groups based on one person's birth in a certain group, which severely constrains mobility between groups. A specific profession, culture, custom, ritual, norms and rules follows each group. The next is the hierarchy of groups in the Indian social strata, from top to bottom, with the brahmines at the top and the tribals and Dalits at the bottom. Thirdly, food habits are restricted. Only one caste and not those belonging to other castes could accept food. The social associations were strictly restricted if a high caste member can not blend with a low caste member. Endogamy is the principle that marriages must be conducted throughout the caste system. Infringement of this principle would result in caste excommunication. Each caste is associated with a specific type of occupation to follow by the members.

## HIGHLIGHTS PROBLEMS IN CLASS AND CASTE

The tragic and inhumane exploitation that Devi highlights reveals India's grassroots reality and its problems in class and caste. Due to the slight differences between class and caste systems, the country and its citizens are fragmented and Tagore's poem, Where the mind is without fear, is echoed where the poet fears that the country will be 'broke into fragments by the small walls' by caste and class, making it a "dreary sand of desert, dying habit" caused by human misery.

In the Marxian sense of the Indian society and its exploitation scenario, Mahasweta Devi's works encompass the Dalit and tribal exploitation. The difference between rich and poor leads to social division. Marx finds the source of this conflict economically, leading to exploitation of classes. The privileged class bourgeoisies are the sole owners and overseers of the means of manufacturing in society that have the sole interest to collect wealth at the expense of exploitation by the underprivileged or the proletariat. The working classes are the poor sections that have to sell their jobs to survive and combat poverty. They are imposed on them by the rich. Mental and physical torture is the means to this end, if such terms are not followed.

A closer review of Devi's story "Breast Giver" reveals a major problem of discrimination as regards class and caste hierarchy. Because of his poverty, Brahmin Kanganlikaran by caste finds it hard to meet both ends. His upper caste and Hindu religion restrictions however do not allow him to engage in work of the lower castes. He is therefore driven into extreme poverty. In refusing to give him a job although responsible for his physical handicap, Cruelty from the top-class Hardar family is exposed.

What is interesting about the approach of Mahasweta Devi towards caste oppression and class oppression is that she not only sketches her oppressed character in a Marxian landscape, but she also reveals her history of oppression and of her reduction to the subaltern. The subordinate is someone who is subject to the ruling class's economic and cultural hegemony. The Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci introduced a term 'subaltern' that included campesino people, women, workers, Dalits and more. The term refers to a range of political subjectivities, dominated by hegemonic structures and ways of maintaining power over those without it by socially dominants and denying subordinated groups a chance to take part in power structures.

Ranjit Guha says that "the general attribute of Southern Asian society's subordination, be it in terms of class, age, gender and office, or in any other manner," is the term denoting deprived and marginalised categories of persons (Guha Vii). For the lesser classes and social groups which are on the fringes of society, the postcolonial people use it. These

groups do not have their own recognition, voice and identity, either socially, politically or culturally, and outside the hegemonic group and structure. One understands how Mahasweta Devi's approach to caste and class oppression reaches a multifaceted view with the idea of the subordinate.

## THE UGLY FACE OF FEUDALISM

Youth's first form of oppression is the use, meaning continued labour extracted to benefit the exploitative group from an individual or a social group. It is an act of making profit by employing people's labour while not compensating them equally. While they are paid for their hard work, they are not receiving a fair salary. The Dalit dome (intactable), where Dhura is forced by the upper caste master to dig the village wells for bare minimum wages and sometimes without wages, appears in Devi's play Water. Ironically, exploitation is not only in the caste line, but also in the class line, because the pools belong to the lower castes, even if their use is prohibited. Lachhima's service, in return for her lifelong service in the household of the master, was paid with a little piece of land by novel The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh.

In Mahasweta Devi's works, "marginalisation" other than "exploitation" is an important subject of oppression. Young marginalisation is the act of exclusion, of relegation or confining to a lower social status an individual or a group of people or the edge of a society. Mahasweta Devi shows that marginalisation, by citing Maghai's example in the Water play, is even worse than exploitation. Devi's characters reveal how they are denied and subject to complete deprivation to any social, political and religious activity. Marginalization takes away the economic, social and political right of an individual, ostracising him from society. The Australian Aboriginal communities were excluded and pushing farther and farther than their homelands, for example, as the cities grew in Australia. Likewise the lower castes / classes in India, because of their low status and their nature of work and their castes, are mainly of the marginalised class.

The well-known story Untouchable from Mulk Raj Anand also represents the same form of oppression in which Bakha protagonist shows disgust for life he leads because of the oppression of the upper castes who deny him the right to live like other people and to take advantage of the opportunity and privileges that rightfully apply in every segment of society. This group is oppressed by its occupation and its caste.

## Bayen highlights marginalisation

Devi's play Bayen highlights this marginalisation vividly where the central character works as a grave digger. The bayen, Chandidasi's life is a moving portrayal of the gendered subalternity represented by her transformation from a working class woman

to a social pariah. Grave digging is a kind of work exclusively intended to be performed by certain lower sections of people. Chandidasi inherits her father's vocation and, as a gravedigger, lives with her family on the outskirts, away from the upper class. In the later part of her life, she is tagged as a bayen harp (meaning witch), expelled from the village and also deprived of work, food, clothing and shelter. The villagers are superstitious about the 'bayen,' so they constrain her in the construction of her lower caste and her vocation.

In the same way, the 'rudalis' in Devi's novel Rudali is another category of people isolated from society since they touch the dead bodies and mourn for the dead. Such marginalisation is the subject of the argument here:

The Shiva idol was bathed in pots and pots of milk donated by the rich. People paid pandas money to drink glasses of this milk and quickly fell ill with cholera. A lot of people died. Including the father of Budhua. Government officials have taken the victims off to the hospital tents. Sanichari and her son sat down and waited beyond the barbed wire. Sanichari and Budhua were taken off for vaccination against the disease. The pain of the injection caused them to howl. Still crying, she washed her head off the union in the shallow river of Kuruda, broke her brackets, and returned to the village. The Panda of the Shiva Temple in Tohri demanded that she make ritual offerings there before returning to her village, since her husband had died there. On his insistence, she spent a precious rupee and a quarter on a spartan offering of sand and satu, which Budhua offered as a panda (Rudali 56-7).

#### **Mother of 1084**

Mother of 1084 reveals the powerful impact of imperial influence on the aristocratic lifestyle of the Chatterji family to which Sujata and her younger son Brati belong. The novel exposes the hypocrisy of the family members in their fear of preserving their reputation in artificial socio-cultural gatherings, celebrations, falsified values and patterns of behaviour that overshadow their human qualities. Sujata's association with the commoners makes her a victim of loneliness in her own household after her son's death. Sujata is also suffering oppression because she is a woman, dominated by her husband and family members.

#### **MAHASWETA DEVI'S APPROACH TO OPPRESSION CULTURAL IMPERIALISM:**

Mahasweta Devi's approach to oppression can be further understood from Young's concept of "acceptable cultural imperialism." "Cultural imperialism at the same time involves imposing the culture of those in power and establishing it as a norm. The dominant groups control the beliefs, mannerisms and communication methods of the oppressed. In this way, the dominant group's beliefs are disseminated,

expressing their values, goals, achievements and experience. If one dares to refute it, one is subject to oppression. The Whites have their own identity and voice because they are the dominant group. In the same way, males consider themselves superior to women and impose their beliefs on women. Mahasweta Devi's work reveals how cultural imperialism in India has led to further oppression of the marginalised.

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Another form of oppression is violence that Young considers to be the most obvious and visible form of oppression. In Devi's work, too, violence is the most obvious and visible form of oppression that Devi has brought out in her work. This is where Young considers violent situations to be something where individuals or members of a particular group are humiliated and destroyed without motive or cause. Physical violence against women in the form of rape and sexual harassment can be found in Devi's work and discussed in detail in the third chapter.

The play Mother of 1084 shows the acts of torture and violence committed by police Saroj Pal against Naxalite activist Nandini Mitra. She describes, through her innumerable works, the humiliation, intimidation and encounters inflicted by the police in the form of physical abuse. All this led to the deaths of innocent people and the family deprivation of the breadwinners. In "Draupadi," the military official, Senanayak's senseless orgy of murders, assaults, counter-assaults and sadistic tortures against tribal activists reaches a point where "If anyone is caught ... his eyeballs, intestines, stomachs, hearts, genitals soon become fox food, vulture, hyena, wild cat, ant and worm, and the untouchable go out happily to sell their bare skeletons" ("Draupadi" 95). Sometimes police are found to combine clever strategies with violence in order to capture their victims. Mahasweta Devi lists one such strategy in the "Draupadi" storey, in which the army baits to capture the entire rebel group by putting the already dead tribal leader Dulna Mehjen in a public place.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

*Swarna Kumari Ghosal (2013)*, Rabindranath Tagore's sister, was a musician, writer, author,

playwright and correspondent. Her main compositions were *Deadly Garland* (2014), *Incomplete Song* (2015) and *An Indian Love Story* (1910). Her work mostly reflected the white collar class environment, and as director of the *Bharathi diary*, she was basically distributing logical articles to teach non-English - speaking Indian women in the most recent logical recognitions. She was one of the most prestigious scholarly figures of the time and a light conveyor in the women's work show in Bengal.

**Cornelia Sorabji (2015)**, an Oxford-based legal adviser with a high level of experience and evangelistic intrigue, fought for the cause of women, especially widows and ladies in *Purdah*. Her compositions, "Love and Life Behind the *Purdah*" (2017) *Sun-Babies*, *Studies in the Youngest Life of India* (2016). *Behind the Twilight* (2014) *India Calling* (2014) and *India Recall* (2018) were filled up as social improvement apparatuses. Ladies in most early books are, essentially, Indians in receptivity, creative with the usual ladylike characteristics of validity, love and abdication.

**Santha Rama Rao(2012)** has risen to take stock of the characteristic quality of traditional Indian traditions in any event when it interacts with western culture. Typically, the characters are portrayed with a global foundation. She portrays the characters of her ladies as the person who goes on a 46-year search for culmination, and an effort is additionally made to study Ladylike brain research. Her ladies are commonly portrayed as victims of political events and are now and again affirmed as war crooks. They want to have the experience of "living," so they're looking for inventive professions. The creator is the master of describing her heroes with concern and mindfulness. Like Jane Austen, she 's comfortable delineating the characters of the ladies. As an Indian lady taught in the West, she brings a glorious reliability to her errand.

For example, the heroes of, **R. K. Narayan** *The Dark Room* and *Mulk Raj Anand* the *Old Woman* and the *Cow* or *Gauri*. Women's characters are thoughtfully delineated freely in their own right. Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Amitav Ghosh's* *The Shadow Lines*. The minimised circumstances of the women as young lady, wife, widow, mother have been expressed in the short storeys and books of *Salman Rushdie*, *R. K. Narayan*, *Raja Rao*, *Mulk Raj Anand*, *Amitav Ghosh*, *K. S. Karanth*, *Rohinton Mistry*, *Bhabani Bhattacharya*, *Rajinder Singh Bedi* and many others. It is not out of the question to state that Indian male creators have been incredibly delicate to the subjects of the lady, and that they have tried to bring her together rather than underestimate her. More than men, however, the Indian women 's authors turned to the reality of the lady, with more prominent force and devotion.

In his famous essay *The Future Results of British Rule India*, **Karl Marx(2013)** argues that caste hierarchy and oppression, The exploitation of underprivileged

castes can not be separated from the exploitation of the underprivileged. The Marxist form of class struggle. This means that if one looks at it closely, In particular, caste and class oppression can not be seen from the Indian context. They are very differentiated as they are inseparable contexts. Most Indians Political theorists state that there are elements of both class and caste. The Society of Indians. In other words, it can be said at the grass root Level, class oppression and caste oppression are invariably mixed together. It's together. The oppressed, for example, are poor and at the same time, Dalits; they are workers and peasants, and also part of the underprivileged. It's caste.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand that sex and identity are the main aspects that affect an individual's life, in particular in our subalteric society.
2. Studying Mahasweta Devi as a prominent writer who strives hard for women's freedom from globalisation.

## CONCLUSION

Human oppression versus human oppression Environment. Environment. Mahasweta Devi expresses concern for the human world and The ecological environment is an important issue for discussion. Her love and responsibility for the protection of the environment It was reflected in her works, such as *Aranyer Adhikar*, *Chotti Munda* and his *Arrow* and short storeys like "Pterodactyl", *Puran Sahay* and *Pritha* "The Arjun." The author says this concern is the result of her school life. Experiences in *Shantiniketan* where *Tagore* 's influence was direct It's prevalent. He taught students how to take care of nature by planting trees, Watering sapling and digging ponds in nearby tribal areas. She's It marks its position as an environmental crusader in India by expressing its opinion Support for forest restoration, as well as land and forest rights The original Indian inhabitants, the *Adivasis*. There are different Indian and foreign writers to deal with. The specific and unique subject of class , caste and gender oppression. What is it? The difference between Devi and them is her extensive dealings with all of these The forms of oppression in a unique way. Her unrelenting battle for the The homeless and the tortured are not limited to writing fiction, but finds Expression in other genres of non-fiction writing that was a great creation Impact on the national sphere.

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