

SOCIAL-POLITICAL RELATIONS AND INEQUALITIES IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S WORKS

Meenakshi Rani ¹

Research Scholar
Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo
meenusharmabnl1989@gmail.com

Dr.Sunny Kumar²

Assistant Professor
Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo
sunny.kumar006@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Mahasweta Devi's writings are extremely deep rooted in the context of conflict, which manifests in various forms across her works. Mahasweta Devi's work 'Draupadi' demonstrated the cruelty of patriarchal society while demonstrating against gender-based and societal injustice and violence. Although Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated this story into English, we will attempt to comprehend it in both Bengali and English and unquestionably examine the caste- and class-based discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and torture that "Draupadi" or "Dopdi" endured from a social, sexual, and regional perspective. This theoretical study examines how a backward tribal woman dealt with social and gender-based inequity and how it was related to gender discrimination throughout the Mahabharata time. In addition to discussing various definitions, this essay assesses and redefines the term "political" as it appears in Mahasweta Devi's Mother of 1084. This paper primarily discusses the Naxalite movement, which started in a small West Bengal village in the 1970s and had an impact on middle-class socioeconomic and political circumstances as well as capitalist society. The current essay also examines how she is a part of a male-dominated culture that views women as objects of sex, ignored, and oppressed beings, and how she rebels against the long-standing, established order and shakes the foundation of that corrupt society.

KEYWORDS

Discrimination, Social, Political, Marxism, Naxalite

INTRODUCTION

One of the most prominent authors in post-modern India is Mahasweta Devi. Her writings, which have been translated into other languages, have brought her recognition and respect on a global scale. Her activities and extensive publications have established her as a renowned author with a strong social conscience. Mahasweta Devi has written to raise the voices of oppressed women,

bound slaves, landless laborers, tribal people, and peasants. She was the editor of *Bortika*, a Bengali quarterly that served as a platform for underprivileged peasants, tribal people, agricultural and industrial workers, and even rickshaw pullers who, at the time, lacked a voice or a place to advocate for themselves. Like Shaw, she employed theater as a vehicle for active rebellion against authority and other social norms as well as for accurate portrayals of modern social ills. She's employed drama as a tactic or tool to combat the oppressors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Alice Jardine has written about the range of issues that women encounter due to their gender identity in her book *Configurations of Women and Modernity*. "The use of "woman" as a diagnostic term is inherent to modernity; in fact, the value placed on the feminine, woman, and her historical connotations as somehow inherent to new and essential ways of thinking, writing, and speaking.

The writers of *Subaltern Studies*, Amin Shahid and Dipesh Chakrabarty, talk about and examine Mahasweta Devi's social activity, which aims to use fiction to drastically alter society. The concrete and intangible elements of subaltern reality are supposedly the source of her creativity. Her narrative universe is constituted, informed, and patterned by this concern. In their day-to-day lives, her protagonists are caught between a variety of paradoxical and multifaceted forces at the intersection of the mainstream and the periphery.

METHODOLOGY

The study's foundation is the use of analysis, critical assessment, and interpretation methods to Mahasweta Devi's writings. Therefore, a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative analyses to provide thorough insights into Mahasweta Devi's selected works will be used. The study aims to detect any instances of disadvantaged sensitivity in the books chosen for the study. First, Devi's writings will be subjected to a qualitative textual analysis using close reading strategies to find recurrent themes, narrative devices, and depictions of oppression and resistance.

DISCUSSION

Socio-Political aspect in Mahasweta Devi's work-Drapaudi

The works of renowned Bengali author Mahasweta Devi have influenced the lives of marginalized people. She openly acknowledges her concern for this oppressed society in her Bengali book "*Srestha Golpo*" (Collection of Short Stories), which has been attempted to translate as follows:

"That part of the society that I call The Voiceless Section of Indian Society must come back again and again in my writing. In addition to being underdeveloped, illiterate, and poorly literate, this group is still mainly cut off from the outside world. However, you cannot truly understand India if you are unaware of this aspect of Indian society." (Devi 9–10).

In 1977, "Parichoy" magazine published this story for the first time. We can infer from the story that caste and gender prejudice are prevalent. In addition, the narrative was written during the Naxalbari Movement, a political revolution that was occurring in the center of Bengal. Mahasweta Devi's stories also indicate her belief in Marxist theory. It is now necessary to give a brief explanation of why she adhered to Marxism and its significance, especially during that period in Bengal. First of all, Marxism is a socialist concept rather than a political one. Karl Marx formulated this conflict theory based on three tenets:

I. Class battles have shaped society up to this point.

II. This consciousness is determined by man's social learning.

III. The dominating material force in society, the class, is in charge of intellectual sphere.

Marxism is the fundamental idea behind creating a society without classes. Using the terms "Dialectic" from Hegel and "Materialism" from Feuerbach, Marx developed the idea of dialectical materialism. He thought that a society without classes could become healthy. Casteism, discrimination, and religion are rendered obsolete by Marxism, which also imposes equality of opportunity in all spheres of life. The Naxalbari movement, which may be characterized as a regional political perspective of Marxism in West Bengal, was another fresh wave of political views that the state was dealing with in the 1970s. Why is it associated with Marxism?

In this socio-political scenario of Naxalite movement 'Draupadi' arrived. Mahasweta Devi in this context said, "The Naxalite movement between the late sixties and early seventies, with its urban phase climaxing in 1970-71, was the first major event after I had become a writer that I felt an urge and an obligation to document. ...A responsible writer, standing at a turning point in history, has to take a stand in defence of the exploited. Otherwise history would never forgive him..."

"In the spring of 1967, there was a successful peasant rebellion in the Naxalbari area of the Northern part of West Bengal," Gayatri Spivak said, underscoring the political unrest. "Naxalbari has spawned an indigenous agrarian reform leadership led by the lower classes," including tribal cultivators, Marcus Franda claims, "unlike most other areas of West Bengal, where peasant movements are led almost solely by middleclass leadership from Calcutta." Numerous Naxalbaris were inspired by this odd alliance between intellectuals and peasants throughout India. The long-standing oppression of landless peasants and nomadic farm workers, which was maintained by an unofficial government-landlord cooperation that too readily got outside the law, was the focus of these movements.

In a political setting, the gentlemen revolutionaries, class deconstruction and their involvement with legality and violation become more significant. "On the one hand, a law that is fabricated with a view to its own transgression, on the other, the undoing of the binary opposition between the intellectual and the rural struggles" (386), is how Spivak has defined two "deconstructive formulas". Inequality based on caste is simply an inevitable reality of the society. Ancient and eternal are the bloodshot eyes of the upper castes toward the lower castes. Dopdi changed Draupadi's ethnic dialect, turning the immortal into a mortal. There are hints of this throughout the

narrative. Despite being illiterate and savage, Draupadi was politically active and armed. Since the Vedic era, the idea of "untouchables" has been widely accepted. The Chaturvarna system of four castes has changed based on circumstances, events, and demands, but it is still in use today. Even in the twenty-first century, it still exists. Despite numerous demonstrations, revolutions, uprisings, and acts of sedition, the goal of a classless society has not yet been realized. Draupadi and Naxalbari were only a small portion of the greater revolution. After being subjected to ongoing exploitation and tyranny, the oppressed rebel against the oppressor in order to bring about a revolution. Likewise, the story's ostracized backward mob's patience was once stoked. As a result, they also spoke out against capitalism. In this instance, Surja Sahu represents capitalism. This is how Devi's story makes the prejudice based on class and social status clear. For the sake of civilized society, it is acceptable to overlook the struggle of the lower castes as portrayed in "Draupadi," but "there is hope that the new inquisitions and new archaisms may still be defeated because writers like Mahasweta Devi...continue to create new and inventive visions of life and to denounce bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and hatreds of all sorts in poetic, comic, and ever-renewed language." In the postmodernist intellectual environment of cynicism and nihilism, this is a reassuring idea. Dopdi was a proud member of her tribe, representing the lower tribes in the discriminatory society. She felt proud of her caste despite being backward because she thought there was togetherness among them that the higher class lacked, whereas elite society was causing them to feel ashamed of their lower caste. The elite society acknowledges that blood has discriminatory value as well, which Dopdi presented as evidence that the elites passed on perfidy to them. Dopdi really attempted to make them feel proud of their caste more than superior society wanted them to feel inferior because of their caste. Therefore, she assured that if she was captured, she would not reveal anyone's identity. "How one can come to terms with torture" was what she had learned. Under torture, Dopdi will bite off her tongue if her body and mind fail (397). She would never betray her own people, though. Despite being powerless (based on weapons and technology), illiterate, and unsophisticated, the author attempted to illustrate how they were all unified and that no one could destroy this.

Socio-Political aspect in Mahasweta Devi's work -Mother of 1084

The functioning of the Naxalite movement must be examined in order to comprehend the meaning of "political" in Mahasweta Devi's play Mother of 1084. Beginning in a small West Bengali village in the 1970s, the Naxalite movement spread to neighboring States and questioned the Indian Constitution. Further, Mahasweta Devi states the nature of Naxalite movement during 70s,

In the seventies, in the Naxalite movement, I saw exemplary integrity, selflessness, and the guts to die for a cause. I thought I saw history in the making and decided that as a writer it would be my mission to document it (qtd. in Lahiri 6).

The book offers a political analysis of the reasons for Brati Chatterjee and his friends' inhumane slaughter. The orchestrated violence against the Naxalites in 1970–71 included the murder of Brati Chatterjee and his associates. The cops are responsible for the massacre, the hired goons, the ruling party, and even the Left Establishment parties engaging in an unholy alliance. During this time, the urban Naxalites were completely at the mercy of the situation and in complete chaos and retreat. The most important character during the entire play is Sujata, the

mother of corpse number 1084. The dynamics of grief, excruciating anguish, and eventual loss brought on by her younger son Brati's untimely death are finally understood and accepted by Sujata. She is adamant that her son Brati did not commit any crimes. The Hindu code was something he was hesitant to adopt. She is aware that "the only penalty for people who lose faith in the system is death." After Brati's passing, she has no one left to live for, and her existence is empty.

The government's hostility and violence targeting young people who adhered to the Naxalite ideology—which is regarded as a branch of communism—are the main themes of the book. As attention turns to the killing of Brati, Sujatha Chatterjee's younger son, who serves as the spokesperson for a countless young rebels who were mercilessly killed by the state. The drama opens with the introduction of Sujata, the title character. She is the wife of Dibyanath, a chartered accountant, and the mother of four children. She thinks all of her children are content in their marriages, but she eventually learns that these joyful unions were all a front. It is clear from analyzing the events in this book that Brati was a victim as well. He is viewed by us as a revolutionary who opposes the feudal system that made life difficult for both peasants and tribal people. Sujatha is reflected in Brati's character who is not drawn to the world's wealth and luxury. Instead, he was conscious of society's marginalized and economically disadvantaged minorities. He opposes the illogical morals and all of the political pledges regarding the restoration of the tribes, which thrilled the peasants and encouraged the politicians and landlords to exploit the impoverished peasants.

Thus, we learn about the treatment of minority classes and class exploitation in India in 1967. She interacts with the folks whose cause Brati won over during the learning process. It keeps going till she starts to identify more with her son's philosophy. She discovers a part of life that she had previously been unaware of after her encounter with Somu's mother and Nandhini. She now associates herself with people's plight and pain. She has been living a restricted life up to this point, carrying out her responsibilities as a mother and a housewife. Her soul is stirred by her son's passing, and she emerges from her shell and gains social awareness. The issues at the local level, making her a socio political analyst of the underprivileged group. Writing in the middle of the 20th century, this prominent Bengali author and social activist was not afraid to call attention to the inequalities that were pervasive in society. This essay discusses her book "Mother of 1084," which explores the powerlessness of a mother who learns about her son's ideal after his passing.

CONCLUSION

The story encompasses a wide range of social backgrounds, so we can use it as a mirror of society in both positive ways—such as feminist power, political ideology, protesting injustice, and mythological elements—and negative ways—such as racial harassment, sexual oppression, marginalized life struggles, social discrimination, gender inequality, and more. "Mahasweta Devi's *Dopdi* has been relegated to the position of 'Other' marginalized and in a metaphorical sense and was forced to pursue guerrilla warfare against imperial domination," I can say, agreeing with Dr. Sinha's statement. However, she created her own language by rejecting the binary structures of patriarchal discourses of the political, social, and ideological forces of the society. The play *mother of 1084* accomplishes two goals. Initially, it displays two distinct mother faces. Second, it

examines the dire circumstances that gave rise to the Naxal movement. The components of "understanding, loving, angry, confident, and a rebellious one who seeks justice" are examined in the second section. The play's climax emphasizes the disrespectful reaction that a mother's suffering causes in a heartless society.

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