

Oppression and Marginalization in Mahashweta Devi's Works

Meenakshi Rani¹, Dr. Sunny Kumar²

Research Scholar¹, Assistant Professor²
Guru Kashi University, India

Keywords:

Class,
Caste,
Gender,
Oppression,
Marginalization

Abstract: Mahasweta Devi is a modern-day writer who addresses all of these types of oppression in her writing. The fervour of activists in Mahasweta Devi's writings, which symbolizes her commitment in the issues of the impoverished, sets her apart from other writers, male and female. By exposing the various forms of oppression ingrained in Indian society and advocating for their rights, it offers voice to the voiceless. Mahasweta Devi's approach to oppression is distinct because, in contrast to most women writers, Devi addresses the problem of gender oppression as it is embodied in the class and caste dichotomies that affect middle-class and upper-class women. So, the aim of writing this paper is to show her writings examine the many forms and patterns of oppression, including class, caste, and gender oppression.

INTRODUCTION

Mahasweta Devi has gained recognition as a writer and name among readers in Bengali and other languages, as well as readers worldwide who can access her writings through translation. She is now well-known all around the world. She is one of the few writers that never settles for the status quo and instead constantly strives to discover and explore something new and difficult. Her contribution is significant in terms of both volume and value. Her works shows a significance of a creative writer.

For many years, Mahasweta Devi has been actively fighting for marginalized groups and indigenous people. Her writings easily reflect her activism, supporting this viewpoint. "Mahasweta's current reputation as a writer rests largely on her own self-projection as champion of the tribal cause and decier of class prejudice," argues RadhaChakravarty in her book *Feminism and Contemporary Women Writers*. As an advocate for India's tribal population, she is especially committed to securing their social, political, and economic stability. She speaks out a lot on how the tribal people are being driven from their natural habitat and means of subsistence the forests.

Mahasweta Devi's connections and personal experiences with underprivileged people, especially tribal and Dalit populations, had a profound influence on her literary works. Because of her deep involvement in their lives, she was able to accurately and

sympathetically convey the subtleties of their experiences. Readers were given a glimpse into the hardships and resiliency of the downtrodden through Devi's writing, which demonstrated her profound awareness of the social, economic, and cultural realities that affected their lives. Devi's activism was shaped by her experiences with marginalized populations, which also influenced how she approached social transformation and lobbying. Her personal encounters with injustice and exploitation strengthened her resolve to defend the rights of the oppressed, inspiring her to take on repressive power structures and subvert prevailing narratives. The history of oppression can be linked to differences in caste, creed, religion, sex, and social and economic hierarchy. Primal Indians were exploited because of their skin colour and low socioeconomic standing. The height of the adverse degeneration occurred under British control. The plethora of troubles brought about by social classes, religious conflicts, unequal land ownership, and caste concerns made it possible for the impoverished to be further exploited. By virtue of their property holdings, the higher classes and castes inherited the power. Because the upper classes enforced their own standards and made the lower classes to follow them both culturally and religiously, the divide between them grew even wider.

The term "caste" was first associated with India's antiquated, strictly stratified class structure, which divided people into groups based on shared characteristics like status, income, or occupation. It is thought that the name "castus" has its roots in Latin and means "purity" or "morally pure." Casta, a Portuguese term meaning "race" or "linearity," is where the word originates in English. In the 1700s, casta was originally identified with the Hindu social stratification system. A caste is a group of families or collections of families with a common name who share a mythological ancestry, either divine or human.

There are various features to the caste system. To begin with, there is the segmentation of society into groups according to a person's place of birth within a certain group, which significantly limits movement within and between groups. Every group adheres to a particular set of rules, conventions, rituals, professions, and cultures. The next shows the top-to-bottom hierarchy of Indian social groupings, with Brahmin at the top and tribal and Dalit at the bottom. Dietary needs are limited. Food might only be accepted by members of one caste and not by members of other castes. If a person of a higher caste cannot mix with someone of a lower caste, then their social connections are severely limited.

OUTLINES ISSUES IN THE CASTE AND CLASS

Devi draws attention to the terrible and cruel abuse that exposes India's caste and class issues. Owing to the marginal distinctions between the caste and class systems, the nation and its people are divided. Mahasweta Devi's writings address the Dalit and tribal exploitation in the context of Indian society and its capitalist system. Divide in society results from the disparity between the rich and the poor. Marx identifies the economic root of this antagonism, which results in class exploitation. The only people who own and manage society's manufacturing resources are the bourgeois privileged class, whose only

goal is to amass wealth at the cost of the proletariat or the less fortunate. The impoverished groups that must sell their occupations in order to exist and fight poverty are the working classes. The wealthy force them onto them. If such terms are not met, the means to this purpose include pain, both mental and physical.

Two types of resistance are depicted in Mahasweta Devi's narrative "Draupadi": the first takes the shape of tribal insurgencies, while the second is embodied by DopdiMejhen, an active member of the Naxalbari movement who is pursued and sexually assaulted in an attempt to subdue rebel organizations. Draupadi turns into a symbol of defiance. She stands in for the millions of tribal women who are brave enough to oppose patriarchy and imperialism in their fight against oppression. The tribal woman experiences multiple forms of marginalization because she constantly fears becoming a victim. Instead of romanticizing tribal women, Mahasweta Devi's works are so realistic that they awaken readers from their sleep and urge them to reexamine their notion of tribal identity and rights. Mahasweta Devi is a south Asian writer and activist who has effectively depicted ethnic group issues in her writings. Two indisputable facts are demonstrated by the re-presentation of Dopdi: first, that she can be re-presented as a "agent" and second, that the subaltern woman can be re-presented in creative writing. The story revolves around DopdiMejhen (Draupadi), a Santhal tribal woman who becomes a revolutionary in the fight against feudal oppression and exploitation. She and her husband, Dulna, are part of a group of Naxalite rebels fighting against the oppressive landowners and government forces.

Dopdi is eventually captured by the authorities. She is tortured and raped by the police officers as a form of punishment and humiliation. However, in a defiant act of resistance, Dopdi refuses to be subdued. When the officer responsible for her capture, Senanayak, comes to see her the next morning, Dopdi stands before him naked, unbowed, and defiant, challenging him to cover her or face her resistance.

In Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi," the theme of marginalization is a central focus, explored through the experiences of the protagonist, DopdiMejhen, and her community. Here are the key aspects of marginalization depicted in the story.

KEY ASPECTS OF MARGINALISATION IN DRAUPADI

The Marginalization of Tribes

Dopdi is a member of the Santhal community, which is marginalized and subject to structural discrimination. They are portrayed as being poor and marginalized members of society who lack access to necessities. Feudal lords and state authorities threaten their land and means of subsistence, which prompts them to engage in revolutionary activities.

Marginalization of Gender

Dopdi is a tribal woman who faces discrimination on two fronts: first, as a woman, and second, as a member of a marginalized ethnic group. The narrative eloquently illustrates how extremely susceptible women are to sexual assault and exploitation. The rape of Dopdi by the police is an example of how oppression and power are skewed toward specific genders.

Political Marginalization

The Santhal community's political marginalization is evident in their lack of representation and voice in the broader socio-political landscape. The state views them as insurgents and criminals rather than addressing their legitimate grievances. The authorities' brutal response to their rebellion further underscores their political disenfranchisement.

Cultural Marginalization

The story also touches upon cultural marginalization, as the tribal community's way of life, beliefs, and practices are depicted as being devalued and disregarded by mainstream society. The use of Dopdi's indigenous name "Dopdi" instead of the mythological "Draupadi" can be seen as an assertion of her cultural identity in the face of erasure.

Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" is a powerful examination of marginalization that shows how various types of oppression economic, political, gendered, and cultural intersect to exploit and deny rights to underprivileged groups. Dopdi's narrative is a potent indictment of structural injustice because it shows the tenacity and fortitude of people who oppose such oppression.

Another example is *Mother of 1084* exposes the imperial influence's potent effect on the Chatterji family, Sujata's and her younger son Brati's aristocratic lifestyle. The family members' fear of losing their reputation in fabricated social and cultural events, parades, and behaviors that obscure their humanity is revealed in the story as a sign of their hypocrisy. Following the death of her son, Sujata suffers from loneliness in her own home due to her associations with the common people. Sujata is subjected to oppression as a woman, as she is under the control of her husband and family.

Mother of 1084 exposes the imperial influence's potent effect on the Chatterji family, Sujata's and her younger son Brati's aristocratic lifestyle. The family members' fear of losing their reputation in fabricated social and cultural events, parades, and behaviours that obscure their humanity is revealed in the story as a sign of their hypocrisy. Following the death of her son, Sujata suffers from loneliness in her own home due to her associations with the common people. Sujata is subjected to oppression as a woman, as she is under the control of her husband and family.

The issue of marginalization is interwoven throughout Mahasweta Devi's novel "Mother of 1084," as it portrays the characters' personal and sociopolitical problems. The main facets of marginalization in the book are as follows:

KEY ASPECTS OF MARGINALISATION IN MOTHER OF 1084

Marginalization of Gender

The protagonist, Sujata, is marginalized as a woman in her own family and in society at large. Even though she comes from a wealthy household, her husband and other family members frequently overlook her and don't value her thoughts. As she comes to terms with her son's existence and death and starts to doubt the social mores that have kept her on the outside, her path through the book is one of self-discovery and enlightenment.

Marginalization of Generations

The generational divide between Sujata and her offspring is another topic covered in the book. The radicalism and rejection of the status quo exhibited by Brati are indicative of a younger generation's dissatisfaction with the elder generation's laziness and cooperation in the maintenance of structural oppression. The other children of Sujata, who have complied with social norms, emphasize.

Marginalization in the Family

Sujata has multiple layers of marginalization even within her own family. Sujata's role as a wife and mother is eclipsed by her household's patriarchal framework. Sujata has experienced emotional and psychological marginalization as a result of Brati's political involvement and death, since her family has disregarded her grief and need for understanding.

One way to further understand Mahasweta Devi's perspective on oppression is to consider Young's notion of "acceptable cultural imperialism." "At the same time, cultural imperialism entails imposing and normalizing the culture of the powerful. The oppressed people's views, behaviors, and modes of communication are governed by the dominant groups. The ideas of the prevailing group are spread in this way, communicating their ideals, objectives, successes, and life experiences. One is oppressed if they dare to disagree with it. Because they are the majority group, White people have a distinct identity and voice. Men push their views on women and regard themselves as superior to them in a similar manner. The writings of Mahasweta Devi demonstrate how India's cultural imperialism has exacerbated the marginalized groups' suffering.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ashalatha, P circulated on “Status of Dalit Women in India: Both Caste and Femininity Dependent on Exclusion” in “ParipeX: Indian Journal of Research”. The article aims to highlight the standing of Dalit women in India in this rapidly changing global community. The researcher in that paper details the detrimental effects of the caste system on the educational, social, and economic standing of Dalit women in modern-day India. The article’s primary goal is to highlight the brutal reality of the oppression, struggle, and cruelty Dalit women will face on a daily basis in their miserable existence. The problems faced by Dalit women are not only due to poverty, lack of education, or other personal circumstances; they are also a result of significant corruption and censorship by higher programmes that derive their legitimacy from Hindu religious texts.

Professor Usha Bandetalks about the impact of two-fold opposition on the fiction of post-colonial era. In such binaries, one term powerfully rules over the other. A series of binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized, imperialism/ nationalism, man/woman and public/private lays the foundation of most of Mahasweta Devi’s works (stories and novels). Her fiction aims to project the sufferings of the subaltern women. In such order of colonizer and colonized culture, the females are recognized as an abnormal/ disturbing group both socially and culturally. Devi’s fiction also focuses on turning upside down such dominion. Using the approach of subversion, it endeavors to bring low what was high.

In Mahasweta Devi: Critical Reading, Vandana Gupta has analysed the creative writings of Mahasweta Devi which serve as an exposition of her activist engagement with the subaltern reality. She has depicted how activist subaltern politics informs her literary perspective and creative contexts, radical postmodern idiom, technique pattern and constitute her aesthetic praxis and literary poetics. Consequently, Mahasweta’s art and its unique aesthetics assume significance as it forces the postcolonial creative sensibility and the critical heritage spawned by it to undergo a re-vision and re-definition.

Mahasweta Devi: Critical Perspectives is an anthology of critical essays by Sen N, who examines the defining features of the vast and highly proactive oeuvre of Mahasweta Devi. Mahasweta Devi’s Literary Canvas: A Critical Reading by Pallavi Mishra is a modest attempt to critically dive deep into the vast literary works of Mahasweta Devi that uncover the socio-political and cultural aspects that dominate the lives of dispossessed people. Writings on women occupy a larger space on her canvas, making the writer a conscious voice for women. Community and the Myth & History chapters show the organic relationships shaping themselves on an otherwise uneven surface, celebrating the conflicting traditions of the community. The texts have been read in the context of the postcolonial theory with due emphasis on the concepts of History, Nation, Gender, Myth, and Race that form the base of postcolonial thought. The book, it is hoped, will certainly get a warm reception in the hands of the students, teachers and research scholars who aim to study Mahasweta Devi as an important post-colonial writer.

CONCLUSION

In the area of Indian writing in English, Mahasweta Devi's works offer a wealth of material for investigation and study, especially with regard to the portrayal of underrepresented voices and the function of literature in addressing social issues. In works like "Breast Stories," "Douloti the Bountiful," "Draupadi," and "Mother of 1084," Devi depicts gender dynamics, social struggles, and environmental destruction. Academics can examine these issues in further detail and how they relate with Indian society. In addition, scholars may investigate the socio-political milieu in which Devi created her works, taking into account the ways in which historical occurrences and social movements impacted her compositions and advocacy.

REFERENCES

1. Ashalatha, P. Status of Dalit Women in India: Caste and Gender based Exclusion. *Paripeks: Indian Journal of Research*. Vol. 2, No. 2, 2013, Pp. 254-256.
2. Bill, Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin. *Key Concepts in Post Colonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 1998.
3. Chakravarty, Radha. "Mahasweta Devi: A Luminous Anger" in *Feminism and Contemporary Women Writers: Rethinking Subjectivity*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2008.
4. Das, B. K. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism* Fifth Edition. Atlantic publishers; Dist 2007.
5. Devesh, Arindam. Mahasweta Devi: The Goddesses of the Downtrodden. *Hindustan Times*.
6. *Devi: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. editions. Nibedita Sen and Nikhil Yadav. Pencraft International, 2008.
7. *Devi. Mother of 1084*. Trans. SamikBandyopadhyay. Seagull Books, 1997.
8. DevyN.Ganesh, *The Conventions of Literary History in India: The Two Paradigms* || in *New Quest* Issue 114, P.325-36.
9. *Draupadi*, Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In *Other Worlds*. Methuen, 1987
10. *Mother of 1084*, Translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay. Seagull Books, 1997.
11. Shahid, Amin and Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* Vol. IX, 1996. Print.
12. Young, Iris Marion. *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy*, 1997.