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mishra.binod@gmail.com

Dr. K. K. Pattanayak

Bhagya Residency, Room No.-6,
Ambica Nagar, Bijipur,
Berhampur- 3, Ganjam, Odisha

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Special Issue
on
Mahasweta Devi

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CHHOTE LAL KHATRI**

"Anandmath"

Harnichak, Anisabad, Patna- 800002

Bihar (India)

Mob. : 09934415964

E-mail : drclkhatri@rediffmail.com

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English Translation of The works of Mahasweta Devi

Fiction and Plays :

1. *Five Plays*. Tr. with an introduction by Samik Bandyopadhyaya. (Kolkata: Seagull, 1986). It contains the plays *Mother of 1084*, *Ajair*, *Bayen*, *Urvashi and Johnny and Water*.
2. *Bashai Tudu*. Kolkata: Thema, 1990.
3. *Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants and Rebels : A Selection of Bengali Short Stories*. Kalpana Bardhan, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990).
3. *I Imaginary Maps : Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi*. Tr. with an introduction by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, York and London : Routledge, 1995).
5. *Breast Stories*. Tr. with an introduction by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Seagull, 1997).
6. *Rudali : From Fiction to Performance*. Tr. with an introduction by Anjum Katyal (Seagull, 1997).
7. *Bitter Soil, Stories*. Tr. Ipsita Chanda. (Seagull, 1998)
8. *Old Women : Two Stories*. Tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Seagull, 1998).
9. *Mother of 1084*. Tr. Samik Bandyopadhyaya, Seagull,, 1998.
10. *Titu Mir*. Tr. Rimi B. Chatterjee (Seagull, 2000)
11. *The Queen of Jhansi*. Tr. Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta (Seagull, 2000).
12. *Till Death Do US Part*. Tr. Vikram Iyengar, (Seagull, 2001).
13. *Outcast : Four Stories*. Tr. Sarmishtha Dutta Gupta. (Seagull, 2002).
14. *The Book of the Hunter*. Tr. with an introduction by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Seagull, 2002).
15. *Chhoti Munda and his Arrow*. Tr. with an introduction by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Seagull, 2002).
16. *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*. Tr. Ipsita Chanda (Seagull, 2003).
17. *Diwana, Khoimala and the Holy Banyan Tree*. Tr. Pinaki Bhattacharya (Seagull, 2004).

(Continued Back page of contents)

CONTENTS

CRITICISM

1. EDITORIAL
...../1
2. Mahasweta Devi : A Tribute
Dr. Manas Bakshi/5
3. Mother of 1084 : A Critique of Naxal Movement
Ram Bhagwan Singh/13
4. Mahasweta Devi: A Feminist-Humanist Writer
Dr. Vinita Jha/23
5. The Downcast and the Downtrodden : A Study in Mahasweta Devi's "Dhoul" *"Dhoul"*
Dr. Neeraj Kumar/37
6. Pictures of Social Issues in the Works of Mahasweta Devi
Dr. (Smt.) Lakshmi Kumari/47
7. From Confinement to Emancipation: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*
Sweta Kumari/55
8. Parallels of Political Scenario and Political Issues in the Works of Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi
Amrita Singh/65
9. Mahasweta Devi : The Voice of the Dispossessed
Dr. Rashmi Kumari/74
10. A Subaltern Critique on Mahasweta Devi's Novels
Sumit Talukdar/86

11. Maheswata Devi's Our Non-Veg Cow and Other Stories: A Postcolonial Approach
Dr. Gagan Bihari Purohit/90

GENERAL SECTION

1. Of Margins and Ethics: The Ecocritical Imagination
Dr. Rohit Phutela/101
2. Gender-linked language variation in Khortha: A Case Study
***Swati Priya & **Rajni Singh/113**
3. C.L. Khatri's Poetry Collection *For You to Decide* : An Estimation
Dr. Kumar Chandradeep/130
4. Whitman's Innovative Verse Technique: A Critical Approach
Ram Niwas Sharma/135

POETRY

1. Killing the fattest calf.
O. N. Gupta, Raipur, (CG)/142
2. Nature knits her knickers nonchalantly
O.N.Gupta, Raipur (CG)/143
3. A Transition not so Smooth
Rajiv Khandelwal Agra/144

BOOK REVIEW

1. Chhote Lal Khatri/145
2. Vijay Vishal/147
3. U Atreya Sarma/150
4. Amarendra Kumar/153

18. *Romtha*. Tr. Pinaki Bhattacharya (Seagull, 2004).
19. *Bait*. Tr. Sumanta Banerjee. (Seagull, 2004). The stories are "Fisherman" (Dheebar), "Knife" (Churi), "Body" (Shareer), "Killer" (Ghatak).
20. *In the Name of the Mother*. Tr. Radha Chakravarty. (Seagull, 2004).
21. *Bedanabala. Her Life. Her Times*. Tr. Sunandini Bannerjee. Seagull, 2005.
22. *Wrong Number and Other Stories*. Tr. Subharanshu Maitra. (Seagull, 2005).
23. *After Kurukshetra*. Tr. Anjum Katyal. (Seagull, 2005).

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1. *Ek Kori's Dream*. Tr. Lila Majumdar. (New Delhi : National Book Trust, 1976).
2. *Etoa Munda Won the Battle*. Tr. Meenakshi Mukherjee. (New Delhi : National Book Trust, 1989).
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4. *Our Non-Vegetarian Cow and Other Stories*. Tr. Paramita Bannerjee. (Seagull, 1998).

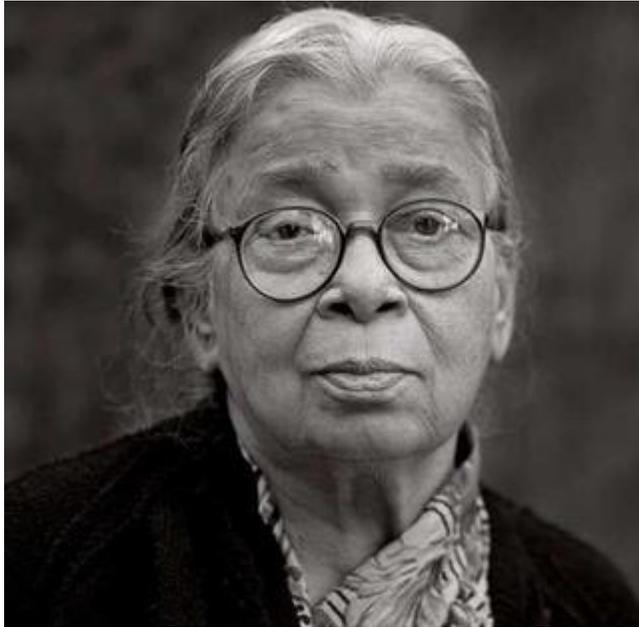
(Courtesy : *Mahasweta Devi : An Anthology of Recent Criticism*
Edited by Nivedita Sen & Nikhil Yadav)

Call for Papers

Cyber Literature invites scholarly papers for its December 2017 special issue on Western Literary Theories and Indian Poetics by 30th November 2017.

Editorial

Dedicated to



Mahasweta Devi

(14 January 1926 – 28 July 2016)

Mahasweta Devi (14 January 1926 – 28 July 2016), born in a middle class Bengali family in Dhaka to literary parents, migrated to India after partition, was perhaps the most prolific and versatile writer of her time and had an active engagement with socio-political movements notably Sangur and Nandigram agitations with an unflinching commitment to the tribals and other marginalized sections of the society. Her literary and journalistic out-put is so voluminous that we can't think of doing any critical justice to the entire body or can adequately represent her works, activities and achievements. This special issue is our humble effort to pay tribute to this legendary activist cum writer par excellence.

She inherited both her activism and penmanship from her parents. Her father, Manish Ghatak was a well-known poet and novelist of the Kallol movement, her mother, Dharitri Devi, was also a writer and a social worker. She graduated from the University of Calcutta and postgraduated from Shantiniketan in English. She wrote in her mother tongue, Bengali more than a hundred novels, plays, short story collections, children fiction and other prose works. She also edited quarterly journal *Bortika*. Her works include to name just a few, *Hajar Churashir Maa*, *Rudali*, *Aranyer Adhikar*, *Jhansir Rani* (novel) and short stories collections like *Agnigarbha*, *Murti*, *Neerete Megh*, *Stanyadayani*, *Chotti Munda Evam Tar Tir*.

Many of her works have been translated in different languages in India and abroad making her “a celebrated icon of third world literature in the First world academia.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has translated Devi's short stories into English and

published three books *Imaginary Maps* (1995, Routledge), *Old Woman* (1997, Seagull), *Breast Stories* (1997, Seagull).

She had been regularly writing in newspapers and periodicals about the life and struggles led by the tribal communities in the states like Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. She studied particularly the Lodhas and Shabars, the tribal communities of West Bengal and worked with them. She began her career in the postal department and got twice sacked for her radical writing in newspapers and then joined teaching fraternity at Bijoygarh College in 1964. She officially retired in 1984 but continued her vocation of writing and fighting for the tribals and the poor till she breathed her last on 26th July 2016. Devi has been drawn to historical narratives not of official historiography but of folk:

I have always believed that the real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, in various forms, of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people across generations. ... 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 amazingly noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw material elsewhere...? Sometimes it seems to me that my writing is really their doing.

She was honoured with various awards notably the Sahitya Akademi Award, Jnanpith Award and Ramon Magsaysay Award along with India's civilian awards Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan. Nivedita Sen & Nikhil Yadav rightly argues that the socio-political fervor of Mahasweta Devi spills over her narratives through a powerfully direct style of

presentation and debates very often 'unmediated through conventional generic requirements.' The present special issue carries a tribute to her by a Bengali writer, Manas Bakshi and ten research papers highlighting her contribution to the humanity and society in general and to the tribal and Dalit community and women in particular. They also evaluate her copious contribution to literature and cultural and literary discourse on feminism, subaltern, tribal, nationalism, nation, sufferings and resistance.

I hope, it would trigger further research in the literary corpus of Mahasweta Devi and in days to come all her works would be available in English translation.

Besides this it includes four general papers and carries usual features like reviews and poems. An official website of Cyber Literature is being launched with this issue- www.cyberliterature.clkhatri.com. I hope the readers would enjoy it and enrich the journal with their feedback.

Editor

Mahasweta Devi : A Tribute

Dr. Manas Bakshi

An undying combative spirit : Mahasweta Devi. A sonorous voice of the suffering marginalised people : Mahasweta Devi. Even more, a paradigm of humanism in practice is the other name of Mahasweta Devi. But there is another zone Mahasweta Devi has nicely explored with as much grit as could be ascribed to each and every part of the grisly struggle that was sustained by her in personal life. It is her literary oeuvre. Her felicity of expression, specially with regard to her writings in articulation of the deplorable condition of the marginalised subaltern segment of our society, is really a source of inspiration to our progeny.

Within the limited purview of the present study, only a few of her works may be dealt with to have a glimpse of her creative pursuit that continued till she breathed her last. It is pertinent to mention, here, that her family background, her grooming at Santiniketan, her participation in the relief works for the famine stricken people in 1943 and her utmost dedication to get involved in activities meant for awakening the backward and deprived people in the tribal hinterland such as Kurmi, Sabar, Lodha, Dusad, Bhangira and the like all over India— all these had cast a significant impact in moulding her mindset, in strengthening her pragmatic attitude to society and its surroundings.

A prolific writer of over one hundred novels and numerous (estimated 350) short stories, Mahasweta Devi pinned her thoughts on socio-economic aspects which indeed need a revival. And she believed that radical change is possible if the so-called ordinary people for whom she waged a struggle all along her life are stirred up. It was for and about those people

that she wrote with an eye to rewriting a realistic chapter of history. It is said that her visit to Palamu in 1965 was a turning point to have opened her eyes before the stark reality of our rural ambient. Still, it was not the earthy attraction or sylvan beauty of forest areas but the struggle for existence of the tribal people that moved her; not the high society culture or romanticism but socio-economic exploitation of common man in the context of the present day political matrices were glaringly manifest in her creative works though its recognition by way of an award like Sahitya Akademi (1979), Jnanpith (1996), Ramon Magsaysay (1997) or Padma Vibhushan (2006) was not her aim.

Now, to dwell on Mahasweta Devi's literary works, what comes to my mind, at the very outset, is *Jhansir Rani*. This historical fiction drew attention at the time it appeared serially in the Bengali periodical, *Desh*. She visited personally the historical spot to unearth the reality, and expose the myth — surrounding the life story of Rani Lakshmibai — as we are often told. Based on historical perspective, *Jhansir Rani* was her first book, but it was in *Aranyer Adhikar* that she revealed a true picture of the socio-economically deprived tribal people in forest areas that are being grabbed by those wielding power. Her insight into such issues as veer around the tribals' survival and fulfilment of their basic needs has, needless to say, added a new dimension to her writings. She has expressed what she found and felt : in the eyes of the tribal people, forest is like their mother; and to most of them, struggling hard for a handful of meal, a bowlful of boiled rice is a dream.

Aranyer Adhikar was later adapted by Tarun Majumder. There are several other novels that were adapted. Let us take up *Rudali*. It needs mention that, in the form of drama, the stage performance of *Rudali* by the noted theatre group Rangkarmi under the direction of Usha Gangopadhaya was a grand success.

The success story of *Rudali* when it was adapted by Kalpana Lajmi in 1993 hardly needs to be retold.

Rudali is a professional mourner belonging to the underprivileged lower stratum of society, bearing the brunt of a custom prevalent in Rajasthan (and elsewhere) that makes her lament and cry beating her chest at the funeral ceremony of a rich man like landlord or money lender against payment of a paltry amount of money and/or food. The novel centres round the fact of life of two widows, namely, Sanichari and Bikhni, who fell victim of a system that made them professional mourners only to be exploited by the rich men, priests and the landed gentry. To this affluent section, appointing such mourners to ruefully weep in black dress, untied hair is considered a status symbol.

Sanichari, born in a poor family of Rajasthan, was ill-fated to have lost her father soon after her birth; the misery was followed by elopement of her mother with her finance. On time, Sanichari got wedded to Ganju, another poor man of the village. Budhua — their son — was born but all this to add to her poverty and toil. Meanwhile, to take advantage of her abject penury, Lakshman Singh — pampered son of local landlord Ram Avtar — seized the opportunity to seduce her in all possible ways. Sanichari desperately fought it off but misfortune struck her again with the death of her husband and her mother-in-law to leave her in a lone mess. And then, the climate : Budhua — her only son — marrying a local whore, went away for good.

Left alone, deserted beyond measure, Sanichari lost even the capacity to lament and shed tears as a professional mourner, called Rudali, could. It was at this juncture that Bikhni, another aged Rudali comes to the fore. The close relationship between the two widows — developing gradually as it should as professional mourners having nothing more than tears to

shed — is delineated well in the novel.

One day, the news of Ram Avtar's death reached Sanichari. Aware of her inability to perform as a Rudali, she still participated in his funeral ceremony where, ironically, she came to know that Bikhni was no more. It was a profound shock that made Sanichari burst into tears. Shedding tears for earning a livelihood — an act that symbolised a Rudali — became real in her life; so much so that Sanichari's character is transformed into that of a real performer, carrying on as a noted Rudali afterwards. Sanichari and Bikhni, the two widows, their struggle for existence and exploitation by the rich and powerful section in a class and caste ridden social system have been critically examined from not only socio-economic but also religious angle essentially signifying their indomitable spirit.

We may now look into another significant novel — *Mother of 1084*. Replete with political contours, the spotlight here is on the turbulently defiant days of the Naxalite movement. It also reminds one of the peasants' upsurge in Naxalbari in West Bengal that surfaced in the year 1967. Honestly speaking, in this novel which was first published in a Bengali magazine — *Prasad*, a political conviction that seeks liberation from colonial as well as bourgeois shackles is highlighted as much as the personal-turned-political manifestation of the innerself of Sujata Chatterjee, mother of Brati, to be more specific, deadbody number 1084.

Sujata Chatterjee, a bank employee with an upper middle class family background, loved her youngest son, Brati very much but was not so aware of his political commitment. Still, it was not beyond her knowledge how a new generation of rebels — symbolising a spirited zeal for emancipation or liberation — was being crushed in the hands of the ruling state machinery in the late sixties and early seventies of the previous century. Brati was part of it. And

the death of Brati along with some of his close friends like Somu — all who subscribed to the same rebellious political ideology — plunged Sujata into a plight of painful existence accentuated by hours and hours of unbearable loneliness.

Sujata sought for respite, even if for a moment, in the company of Somu's mother and Nandini, Brati's love-icon. It was indeed a tragic evening when, returning home, she found all others present there were cheerfully enjoying a mood of celebration on the occasion of her daughter Tuli's engagement. Her helpless look — with only the memory of Brati haunting her always — needs no explication.

While the novel has in backdrop a glimpse of the deplorable onslaught on the rebels, it also sarcastically focuses on the class character of the apparently compromising Brati's father, Dibyanath and elder brother, Jyoti. The upper middle class pretentious attitude becomes clear on the one hand, and the very presence of Inspector Saroj Pal — to wish on the engagement ceremony — who refused to hand over the deadbody No. 1084 to his mother and declined to go upstairs that evening in apprehension of facing the music justifies yet another tricky aspect, on the other.

What makes the novel remarkably distinct is its appeal in totality specially with regard to portrayal of Sujata's character as a universal mother — as if she suffered the pangs of death of a Brati everywhere, all the victims of ruthless tyranny anywhere. Interestingly, eminent film director Govind Nihalani who aptly adapted "*Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa*" has written about Mahasweta Devi — "She wrote some of the most affectionate scenes for me. In my opinion, she has perhaps been one of the best writers we ever had" (*The Times of India*, July 29, 2016).

Though some of her novels have been well adapted, and success of the films hit the headlines, there are

more serious elements in her findings than what can be easily communicated. Govind Nihalani's comment is proof enough. It is said that there are two types of writings — readers friendly and writers friendly. While the first one offers materials for general readership and/or entertainment like soap opera, the second one needs to be studied in depth and if possible, inculcated into oneself. No doubt, apparently reader friendly Mahasweta Devi's writings have a far reaching impact. For, it has been from life, from ground reality revealing the bitter truths the voiceless millions of our country are confronted with even after nearly seven decades of independence.

It is also evident from her short stories like *Standayini*, *Draupadi*, *Chotti Munda O Tar Tir*, *Titu Mir*, *Bharsa*, *Basai Tudu* and some others. Before we conclude, a few words about the same. Take, for instance, just a few stories. First, *Stanadayini* : The story is about a woman compelled by circumstances to enter into the profession of a milk-mother. She is Jashoda — hailing from a Brahmin family but falling into the trap of socio-economic exploitation only because of her ability to produce enough milk as a sequel to speedy birth rate she was subjected to. Suckling some fifty children, one day she is marginalised when neither her husband feels anymore attracted to her nor does her employer need her.

Ironically, as a result of rapid child bearing — numbering twenty, and breast-feeding, Jashoda suffers from breast cancer when there is none to look after. Her death is pathetically lonesome, her cremation by strangers too. The story is an eye-opener to the socio-economic exploitation of woman, and motherhood treated as a commodity — not being revered as it should.

Next story 'Bharsa' is a pen-picture, better said pain-picture, of a middle class ambitious father named

Haren. He tried his level best to educate properly and make a doctor of his elder son, Benoy since he himself could not continue his studies because of poverty. Haren worked hard, sacrificed personally a lot till Benoy became a physician. But it was ultimately to shatter the dream of his father. Married to Abha, a moneyed man's daughter, Benoy did neither support his younger brother to shine in life nor did he do his duty either to his mother stricken with gall stone or his aged, unable-to-earn-anymore, heart-patient father.

In course of time, the death of Haren, refusal of Benoy's mother to accept ` 500/- from him for funeral and the relatives and neighbors' looking askance at Benoy — which he could neither escape nor could endure highlights how a successful son in a material world betrays his ideal father.

Interestingly, in most of her short stories, Mahasweta Devi has been vocal about the marginalised, dalits, tribals and the flaws in our socio-economic system. But a ray of hope is always there to wake up our conscience. One such is Draupadi. As in the epic, the Mahabharata, so also in her story *Draupadi*, Dopdi Mejhen's undaunted spirit of resistance is exemplary. The story tells how a tribal woman, named Dopdi, had to pay the price for her involvement with the Naxalite movement. And even being brutally raped, she stood firm on her stand till the end.

In another story, *Chotti Munda O Tar Tir* (Chotti Munda and his arrow), Chotti's arrow is synonymous with the power that could scare away the oppressors; a time comes Chotti becomes a legend, an emblem of indestructible spirit. Even in her short stories meant for the children like *Bire Dakat O Chire Dakat*, Mahasweta Devi has depicted how, during the British Raj, the tax collectors were treated at the hands of the two, Bire and Hire (Dacoits). In reality, the story

is of bravado to spark of patriotism and nationalism in the minds of the budding community.

Throughout her life, Mahasweta Devi felt the urge to liberate human spirit for organised resistance, and it sprang up from her way of observing things around; her simple way of living and active participation in several movements — be it for Narmada Banchao or against forcible land acquisition at Singur, be it for establishing West Bengal Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samity for protecting their rights or forming in 1980 the organisation, first of its kind, of bonded labourers— made her completely different from the so called Left allegedly swirling in the political complexities of Stalinism and neo-liberalism.

As a social activist, her involvement with the people at the grass root level, her practical experience of living with the Kheria Sabar and Lodha communities gave her the impetus to write for them for stimulating their struggling spirit and articulate their demands for overall betterment. Quite interestingly, there is a blending of the past and the contemporary scenario, of historical reference and present day sociological relevance, of unique style and hearty contents in her creative literature so that it becomes a documentary evidence of time.

And, in fact, it is.

□

Manas Bakshi, a noted pat, short story writer and Journalist at Kolkata.

Mother of 1084 : A Critique of Naxal Movement

Ram Bhagwan Singh

Abstract :

Mother of 1084 is based on the Naxalite movement of 1970's in which a young man is killed. His body is kept in the morgue and labelled 1084. The mother Sujata is called for to identify the body. Sujata regrets her personal loss and details how her son joined the movement and how the government crushed it. While rationalising the movement the novelist has squarely blamed the social structure and administrative connivance. It also shows involvement of different sections of the society which makes the movement a mass movement. The paper proposes to explore a mother's grief and an indictment against the society in the backdrop of the Naxalite movement.

Key words : Patriarchy, anarchy, stigma, subversion, proletariat, microcosm.

The novel *Mother of 1084* is a translation of Mahasweta Devi's Bengali novel *Hajar Churashir Ma*. It is a widely read and much acclaimed novel with its on subdued subject matter and pronounced novelistic design. Though written originally in 1973-74; it still has its after-glow and the resounding cries of a mother's piteous and personalised emotions and sentiments. The novel in its multiple dimensions explores a mother's grief, a wife's agony, a social activist's concern and government's indiscriminate oppression.

Mahasweta Devi wrote a good number of novels and short stories all on a mission to highlight the plight of the down trodden and marginalised people of our

society. In fact, she lived among the tribals of Palamu in Jharkhand for quite some time to see for herself the exploitation and miseries of the tribal folk. Her novels are sizzling accounts of how they were hated, cheated, defrauded, exploited, neglected and condemned by the mighty and crafty non-tribals in league with the local administration. She has also voiced the agonies of the dalits and women still suffering under patriarchy and gender discrimination. Her novels are forceful organs crying equality between man and man, man and woman and social justice for one and all. Through her writing she is a committed revolutionist, a determined social reformer.

Being a native of Bengal Mahasweta Devi saw the Naxalite movement very closely. She knew how and why the suppressed class rose in revolt against the state and the supposed oppressors. The movement let loose a rein of terror and violence, an orgy of indiscriminate killing and destruction, arson and explosion anytime in day or night. It had mostly the urban student radicals imbued with the spirit of idealism to purge the society of its oppressors and perpetrators of injustice social, economic and political victimizing the poor and the marginalised. However, the idealistic spirit brought together young students also from the upper class. In the 70s the movement reached the climax though it is still extant in some pockets most aggressive in South India.

Against this background towards the declining phase of the Naxalite movement Mahasweta Devi wrote *Hajar Churashir Ma* in Bengali translated into English as *Mother of 1084*. It is primarily the story of a mother's emotional outpourings when she comes to know of her son's dead body lying in a morgue after he was killed in police operation against the Naxalites. Two years

later the story begins at night as Sujata is dreaming of her past delivery of her youngest child Brati on the seventeenth of January. Ironically enough, on the seventeenth January again she gets a call from the police to go to Kantapukur to identify the corpse of her son Brati Chatterjee. The son's father Dibyanath Chatterjee does not go nor does he allow Sujata to take his car to Kantapukur as they would recognise his car and him as the father of a Naxalite. He is so indifferent and callous that he does not feel for a moment the urge to rush to see his dead son. He regards him as a stigma on his social respectability. No wonder, Dibyanath and Jyoti do not offer the dead Brati the lighted stick to set his body aflame on the funeral pyre. (18)

Sujata saw his face, battered and smashed. It was all raw flesh with three bullet holes on his body, one on the chest, one on the stomach, one on the throat. The skin around the holes was blue. The cordite had scalded the skin around the hole to leave it parched and cracked into hollow rings. The mother bent low to take a closer look at the face. She would have liked to caress his face with her fingers. But there was not an inch of skin left smooth and clear to bear the touch of her fingers. No doubt, the mother identified the blue shirt, the fingers, the hair of Brati.

The Chatterjees are a respectable family. Mr Dibyanath and other members of the family excepting Sujata have no sympathy for the dead Brati. They all want to hush up the matter and next morning while the papers reported the killing of four students– Somu, Bijit, Partha and Laltu, there was no mention of Brati. Dibyanath did all to wipe Brati out even after his death. The husband, elder son, daughters son-in-law, none of them sympathised with Sujata. They all regarded

Brati as a stigma on the family who had messed up their charming social game. Poor Sujata is alone in her celebration of sorrow silently and privately which again irritates the family. Her elder son Jyoti accuses his mother saying, "Enough is enough, Ma. you've turned this house into a tomb, Ma. Brati is dead. You must think of the living". (29)

Though the Naxalite movement remains subdued, there are stray references to the tortures inflicted on them in prison cells. A thousand watt lamp was focussed at the naked eyes of the person for hours seering the eyes, genitals smashed. Needles under the nails, clamping the burning cigarette to the skin. However, the novel is more focussed on Brati's views on the existing social and political system, his divergent relations with his father, brother and sister, Sujata's sense of alienation and incompatibility in her home and her soul mate, her son though herself in the dark about his secret activities till the end. Brati belonged to a group of young rebels who had committed to purge the society of injustice, inequality and repression. Though the son of an aristocratic family, his views were different from his father's. Dibyanath favoured status quoism with all its shortcomings, but Brati was intolerant, impatient and violent. His slogan was :

The Prison's our University
From the Barrel of the Gun...
This Decade will be the Decade of Liberation
Hate the Moderate, mark him, destroy him
Burn the Police Headquarters to... (18-19)

Brati and his comrades carried out their campaign and subversive activities as they had lost faith in the society ruled by profit-mad businessmen and leaders blinded by self interest. They knew that death was the sentence reserved for everyone of them,

but they were dauntless and had rejected 'a society of spineless, opportunist time-servers masquerading as artists, writers and intellectuals. They knew anybody could kill them with bullets, knives, hatchets, spears with any weapon whatsoever. Even the members of his family regarded him as enemy to them. Ironically enough, 'If Brati drank like Jyoti, if he could go about drunk like Neepa's husband, if he could flirt with the slip of a typist the way Brati's father did, if he could be a master swindler like Tony Kapadia, if he could be as loose as his sister Neepa, who lived with a cousin of her husband's then they could have accepted Brati as one of them'. (31)

But Brati was made of a different stuff. Even as a child he would not be scared by false bogeys. He would listen to reason. He would never be intimidated by threats. He would not be persuaded even by well-wisher's advice as some's mother used to tell him, "Why do you waste your life like this, my child ? You have everything. A well-known father, a mother so learned. He wouldn't say a word. He would only smile" (38) Brati's father Dibyanath knew his son was a rebel, fighting against the self-seeking aristocratic class living at the cost of the poor proletariat. Naturally he regarded his son as his enemy or had at least written him off from his family. But Brati is unambiguous to say, "The individual who goes by the name of Dibyanath Chatterjee is not my enemy." (15) He was against the prevailing system in the society, the class of the big and the powerful. His motto was to liberate the society from the clutches of the money-makers and poor-bashers and regarded his father as one of them. He called his father 'boss' and not loving 'Baba.' Dibyanath called him a milksop. Mother's boy. No manliness. But in the manner of his dying, Brati proved his indomitable strength and courage." (47) However, Brati could never

communicate with his father. NO mutual understanding. One loved his social prestige, material comforts, free life-style, the other loved his ideology of equality, liberty and justice. Brati fought for a change, gave his life for it though nothing happened." Nothing ended. Only a generation between sixteen and twenty four was wiped out." (78)

The nucleus of this novel is mother, the mother of 1084, Brati's mother, Sujata. The greater part of the novel consists in her feelings of sorrow and loss on the death of her son. She alone suffers while other members of the family are indifferent and even critical. Brati's father through his contact manages that the name of his son's involvement and death in police operation against the Naxalites does not appear in the newspapers. At home he removes his book, papers, and other belongings from his study and shuts them up in a box. Even his photo is taken away. Dibyanath has a mocking smile on his face rather than sorrow. He is such callous as to mind only his reputation in the society and nothing else. A father sans fatherly affection and duty towards his siblings.

But Sujata is Brati's mother, his sole centre of love and affection. When she is informed about Brati's death and is asked to identify his corpse, she immediately goes to Kantapukur and sits beside her son's corpse in the morgue mourning alone. She pleads with the police to hand over the corpse to her and when denied she goes to the crematorium and watches his funeral. Sujata reminisces she had been with Brati all day.

His hands were so cold, ice cold, his eyelids, thick black. eyelashes shading his eyes half closed, the white of the skin tanned bronze, the hair dripping with ice water. Cold, cold, freezing,

freezing, ice, ice, she had been with Brati all day.
The night in the crematorium ground. (103)

To Sujata Brati's memories are a bank, a bank of grief, a grief of different sorts. Though herself well-educated and an officer in a bank, she is neglected and ill-treated at home especially by her husband. She is just to satisfy his lust. He would never ask about the children when they are ill. And that day with Brati's death, his father had also died for Sujata. It was Brati alone who she missed and dreamt about again and again." In her dreams, a three-year old Brati still clasped her around her knees. He sobbed and nagged, Ma, don't go to office today". (9) The young Brati had independent views, idealistic views, commonly called leftist views. "Brati's loss leads to a decision to try and understand his mind, to know all those he associated with and understand why he chose this violent path and welcomed such a violent death." (Jain, 197). Sujata had heard that Brati and his friends wrote their slogans on paper first, before writing them on the walls. They wrote on the walls in the dark of the night." (18) They had the courage and conviction to brave the 'ominous might' of the police knowing full well that their activities would draw bullets. Brati kept his activities secret from his mother. And on the sixteenth of January he fooled Sujata leaving home in his blue shirt. However, the way he looked at Sujata before leaving, he found "the lines of agony on Sujata's beautiful dignified, ageing face." (20)

On that fateful day Brati was home all day. When Sujata came back from bank duty, she was surprised to see him. It was only later that she knew that Brati had been waiting all day for a call. A messenger was to warn his comrades but the messenger betrayed and informed the police. Later Brati went out to seek them

where all of them were killed by the police. That explains the fact that the Naxalite movement later on was plagued by rivalry, mutual bickering and enmity. Some of them became police agents in the hope of getting jobs and government contracts. Brati and his comrades were part of the organized massacre of the Naxalites in 1970-71 perpetrated by the police and abated by disarrayed Naxalite groups.

In the words of the author :

In the 70s, 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. As a writer I felt a commitment to my times, to mankind and to myself. I did not consider the Naxalite movement an isolated happening... In the Naxalite movement I saw only a further extension of the movements of the past, especially the Tebhaga, Kakdwip and Telengana uprisings... In my *Hajar Churashir Ma* I portrayed the Naxalite movement in its urban phase in 1971-74; and against that and a generation gap. I set an apolitical mother's quest to know her martyred Naxalite son, to know what he stood for, for she had not known the true Brati ever, as long as he had been alive. Death brings him closer to her through her quest. (xii)

Sujata had no premonition of her son's murder, no sixth sense of a mother. Just a doting mother. At home her mother-in-law was all in all. As long as she had been alive, Sujata had no right to buy a saree of her choice. "She had a shadowy existence. She was subservient, silent, faithful and without an existence of her own." (9) Her husband was indifferent and callous towards her. Since Sujata was more affectionate towards Brati, she was regarded as

belonging to the enemy camp. She had defied her husband and her mother-in-law for Brati. She had never blamed Brati for messing up her neatly organized life. She loved Brati most of all. She rather felt closer to the cook Hem than to Brati's father, brother or sisters. Brati used to say that his father used Sujata 'like a doormat' and no better. Although having a wife and four grown up children, Dibyanath was a great womanizer... he had set up some typist in a rented flat. (81)

The rebel students came from different sections of the society. Some came of a poor family. His widowed mother and unmarried elder sister lived in a ramshackle house, with moss on the roof, cracked walls patched up with cardboard. After Somu's death his mother was totally broken and helpless. How could Sujata console her other than saying that Partho's mother was equally unfortunate. But Somu's mother broke down completely. The sickly woman collapsed under the shock and took to her bed. She regrets that her daughter will never get a job because she is Somu's sister.

Sujata feels aggrieved that while Bratis were being killed in the prisons and on the streets, being torn to pieces by frenzied mobs, the conscience keepers of society had not a word to say about them. She felt terrified to see how these silent witnesses were so complacent and enjoyed living in their happy homes. How could they shut their eyes to the fact that it was only in West Bengal that the youth felt hounded, threatened, on the verge of death. How was it justified in the eyes of the conscientious people? Why had the son's father disengaged his son's tutor because her brother belonged to the Party? Sujata was obsessed with such thoughts and fears about the young people and the cruel times.

Sujata breathes in her grief whether awake or asleep. Being an intellectual she also ponders over the cause and effect of the Naxalite movement and finds it part of a perennial struggle between good and evil and the casual onslaught and persistence of evil. Sujata's unheard agonies affect her as she has problem with her appendix. And the novel ends with her burst appendix.

Though this is a short novel, it can be read as a microcosm of the Naxalite movement and its receding graph. She idealism survives so does evil. The heaven and the earth. One fights and suffers, many others suffer in the chain. The worst sufferer is the human heart on both sides of the movement.

The novel is divided into four chapters– Morning, Afternoon, Late afternoon and Evening. But the action does not adhere to time. The story is not action-oriented though. The mother's agonies pervade the novel space. It is Brati alongside who lies spread over so many places, in so many things. He lives immured within Sujata's inconsolable grief. In passing the novel comments on immoral life-style and hypocritical social values. Though it is a translation work, the language and style give it the pleasure of original reading.

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Dr. Ram Bhagwan Singh, retired professor of English, Ranchi University, Ranchi

Mahasweta Devi: A Feminist- Humanist Writer

Dr. Vinita Jha

Abstract

Mahasweta Devi figures among the revolutionary writers of Bengal. She wrote several novels and short stories highlighting the plight of the depressed classes and the tribals. She also demanded freedom and equality for women with men. She vehemently criticized the caste system, patriarchy, untouchability and exploitation of the poor. This paper presents the image of Mahasweta Devi as a feminist humanist writer most prominently visible in *Breast Stories* and the play *Mother of 1084*. She is as much critical of the society, the police, the public as her own hypocritical family of the 'bhadrak' class. Nobody thinks of the cause of Naxalism and the brutal massacre of young people from Bengal. In *Breast Stories* Mahasweta Devi has focussed on the exploitation of tribal women by the rich people. It is an expose of a tribal woman's gangrape by the police in which her breasts are bitten raw, her nipples torn and lips injured. The victim becomes a revolutionist. The story *Breast Giver* highlights the commoditization of the breast in which a wet nurse is exploited to the utmost degree. The paper is an attempt to evaluate Mahasweta Devi's works from a feminist perspective.

Key words : phallogocentric, subaltern, bourgeoisie, mangled, feudal, trilogy, feminism.

Bengali literature has been abundant, rich and multi-faceted for several centuries. The cultural Renaissance in modern Indian Literature began with Raja Rammohan Roy's interests and inquiries, ranged from the right of women and the freedom of the press

to English education, religious tolerance and the plight of the Indian Peasantry which had been carried on by a number of humanist-feminist writers like Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghose and others for the spiritual awakening of their motherland, languishing under the colonial rule. In the post-colonial scenario of India we may figure Mahasweta Devi in the same group of the Bengali crusaders, fighting for justice of the oppressed sections of humanity. Mahasweta Devi may not be appreciated as an Indo-Anglian novelist since she wrote in her own regional language, Bengali which was translated later into English by eminent cultural critics. She has been acclaimed not only a bold voice of feminism but also a Marxist writer who wrote mostly against the brutal oppression of tribal people and the untouchables by the authoritarian upper-caste landlords. She has written over 100 novels and over 20 collections of short stories which constitute the voice of humanity, craving intensely for the world of non-violence and social responsibility. Philosophically, feminism is linked to humanism, since humanism too deplors the subservience of women to men, and protests against the repression of sexuality. The area of intersection between feminism and humanism is depicted in the words of Toni Van Pelt:

Feminism aims to establish, define and defend equal political, economic, and social rights for women around the world. In addition, feminism seeks to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. This includes a serious and ongoing examination of the sameness of women and men; of our shared humanity. A feminist as well as a humanist is a woman or man whose beliefs and behaviour are based on the definition of equality of all. Feminists are also realists who recognize that inequality exists and is

predictably defended because it advantages one class at the expense of the other. Feminism is a challenge to the status quo as in humanism.¹

Mahasweta Devi focuses on different phases of suffering the women undergo in the society. She does not write as a feminist, but as a human being who opens up the realities of human trauma. In an interview she says:

I am a woman, and I am writing. But, I am not writing of women alone. What I am writing, most of my books, it is about class exploitation, the underclass is exploited, men, women together. Of course, women get worst part of it, but not always. Definitely, I am interested in women's positions, women's thoughts. But I am more interested in active work'.²

The present paper attempts to justify the image of Mahasweta Devi as a feminist-humanist writer in the eight of her much-acclaimed play, *Mother of 1084* (Hajar Chaurashir Maa) and the epoch-making trilogy of short stories, *The Breast Stories*. My work is mainly based on secondary source of information, such as published document, books, autobiographical writings and journal etc.

II

Mahasweta Devi shot into fame with the publication of her novel, *Hajar Chaurashir Maan* which was later translated into English by Samik Bandyopadhyaya. Since Naxalite movement broke out in the remote tribal region of West Bengal or Naxalbari, including a considerable section of urban youths, especially students, Mahasweta Devi, as an eye witness, made an attempt to record the events in this play. Like a true Leftist- Marxist writer, she focused her attention on the selfless and dedicated socio-

political action of Brati Chatterjee and his comrades who died for a cause. However, as the title suggests, *Mother of 1084*, it is the story of a grief-stricken mother, Sujata whose younger son was killed in naxalite movement and who was lying in the morgue as the corpse no. 1084. Sujata's husband tries to hush up the matter with the help of Saroj Pal, the D.C.DD, because he didn't want to identify himself with his naxalite-rebel son, but Sujata, being a mother, couldn't keep herself aloof from such grievous event. Consequently, she went to the police station to identify and to receive the dead body of her son, Brati Chatterjee. Throughout her efforts to receive the dead body of her son, she discovers that all her thirty-four years of her married life, she has been living in illusion as her husband, being an incorrigible philanderer. He forced Sujata to join a bank job not for her economic independence but essentially to help the family tide over a temporary financial crisis. However, Sujata refused to give up her petty bank job even though the financial crisis was over. Except her younger son, Brati, the three other children, two daughters and the elder son are also as hypocritical as their father, Dibyanath Chatterjee. Brati has made no secret of his disregard for the decadent value-system of defunct society, and Sujata finds herself unable to dissuade her son from joining the Naxalite movement, sweeping through the state of west Bengal in late 1960's and early 1970's. During his period of struggle, he comes into contact with a young girl, Nandini, who is also a member of the underground movement and with whom he shares his vision of a new world order. On being betrayed by one of his Comrades, Brati and three of his close associates, Somu, Parsh and Laltu, are brutally murdered by the hired assassins of the police.

When Sujata associates herself with the corpse

No. 1084 only, she realizes the fact that she has been treated as an outcaste not only by her family members but also by her neighbours, and that the art of survival of her family is the systematic denial of Brati and her defiance of the family. Sujata felt shocked when Dibyanath Chatterjee refuses to go to the police station with the fear of stigma in the society for his son's involvement in anti-government affairs. In the words by Sujata:

'But that soon? Even before the body's been identified? A father gets the news on the telephone and does not even think of rushing to have a look? All he can think of it that he'd be comprised if his car went to Kantakapukur ?'³

We get a kind of spiritual and moral evolution of Sujata's consciousness since she tries to compose her fragmented and chaotic life in search of a cohesive identity. She makes a survey of her own past as well as of Brati through self-introspection, and feels that her long-suppressed personal loss is slowly released into the ever-widening spirals of betrayal, guilt and suffering. In the last chapter of the novel, we see a transformed Sujata, one who is more self-assured, morally confident and politically sensitive. She decides to leave the house in which Brati never felt at home, where he was not valued while he was alive, nor his memory respected after his death. Having found a soul-mate in Brati, she turns her back to Dibyanath and his decadent value-system.

We get Sujata's multiple oppressions within a stifling, familial, patriarchal and feudal order. Sujata finds the whole social system cadaverous because she finds no legitimacy for her son's death. She firmly believes that her son, Brati was not a criminal and that death is the only punishment for those who lose their faith in the system. In an Interview in 1983,

Devi points to this movement as the first major event that she felt 'an urge and an obligation to document'⁴. In this story Devi has tried to visualize the reality of 1970's West Bengal and its social impact in her own artistic but humanitarian style. As a humanist, Devi puts a question mark on the role of society and the Government machinery for the sprout of the Naxalite movement. At the same time, she also criticizes the way of controlling and demolishing the underground movement. Devi wants a healthy settlement between 'bhadralok' or bourgeois society and the extremists craving for a new space. She conveys the message through Sujata's attitude that a society must be rejected which has no sympathy for those rebellions who try to end the class discrimination.

III

Mahasweta Devi declares in one of her interviews:

'I often say that my word is divided between two things- The needful and the needless. I am interested only in the former. I don't have much use for the needless'.⁵

She is of the view that those women who are most directly and drastically affected by the dictates of patriarchy and those who lie at the bottom of the socio-economic classes, are needful, and to whose plight she likes to lay bare the society. Devi's Breast Stories are originally written in Bengali, but they are translated into English by Post-colonial feminist critic, Gayatri Spivak in 1997. This collection of three stories is known as breast stories because breast remains a common factor in all these stories which Spivak thinks a form of exploitation of women from marginalized communities. The epoch-making story 'Draupadi' documents the Adivasi resistance against the exploitation by the wealthy landowners in the Northern

region of the West Bengal district. It depicts the story of the capture and the horrifying brutal rape of a tribal insurgent named, Dopdi Mejhens who, along with her husband Dulna, is on the list of most wanted criminals in West Bengal. Devi uses both the versions of her name, juxtaposing 'Draupadi' and 'Dopdi' to make the story multi dimensional. Dopdi and Dulna cleverly manage to evade the law several times but Dulna is one day gunned down by policemen. After her husband's death, Dopdi continues the incomplete job of her husband by helping tribal fugitives so that the violent message of her husband 'Ma-ho' come true. She is finally caught and put in police custody where she is brutally raped and tortured several times by the police to extract information from her. Her breasts are bitten raw, her nipples torn. Her swollen lips blued profusely. She becomes unconscious, but as soon as she gains her consciousness she hears the mockery of the guards who again resume their duty of 'making her'. When Senanayak orders that Draupadi should be presented before him, she first surrenders meekly, but suddenly she tears off her cloth and insists on going to him without clothes. Her refusal to be clothed stands as a symbol of political resistance as well as the challenging of the Patriarchal norms. With bruises and gaping wounds all over her body, Draupadi mocks at Patriarchy in her shrill, Sarcastic tone:

What's the use of clothes? You can strip me,
but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man....
There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I
will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can
you do ?⁶

A baffled Senanayak looks at the consequence of his orders, whereas a naked Dopdi laughs at his angered expression and says that there is nothing more he can do to hurt and humiliate her. The story ends

on a powerful note when a naked Dopdi, with her courage and stubborn refusal to cover her naked body renders several guards and the arrogant officer helpless, scared. Spivak remarks in her forward to this translation may be highly justified:

It is when she crosses the sexual differential into the field of what could only happen to a woman that she emerges as the most powerful 'Subject', who, still, using the language of sexual 'honour' can derisively call herself 'the object of your search' whom the author can describe as a terrifying super object – an unarmed target.⁷

Mahasweta Devi names her protagonist after the classical character but makes these illiterate, poor, tribal women more powerful than her counterpart from the great epic. The modern counterpart shows an indomitable courage and is silent no more. The story goes beyond the realm of mere bodily exposure where the 'fully clothed officer stand 'exposed' in every way'.⁸ Dopdi turns her mangled breasts into an instrument of violence with which she disarms her opponent. Draupadi is one of Devi's most powerful tales for it urges the marginalized to dissociate from the norms for respectability and modesty mapped out by the patriarchal caretakers, for it is the only way to weaken the enemy and gain freedom from the clutches of Patriarchy.

Breast-giver is the second story related to breast which highlights the commoditization of the breast – an object which vacillates between notions of filial piety and gendered violence. Jasoda, a Brahmin wet-nurse bears many children and suckles even more than the human capacity can do. Her husband, Kangalicharan became a handicapped person because his legs had been crushed in the road accident, and consequently, Jasoda has made a career out of the feminine and

maternal processes like gestation and lactation. She decides to work as a professional mother, and this pious opportunity is given to her by the wife of Mr. Haldar. Kangali looks after cooking at home and Jasoda becomes an image above 'the mother cow'. Soon she becomes an object of great reverence and devotion everywhere in the town. This shows a common acquiescence to exploitation of women. Marxist feminist critic Gayatri, however, states that the character of Jasoda is a parable for India after colonization.

The sons of Haldar do not want their wives figure to be ruined by breast-feeding. Jasoda gives birth to seventeen children in order to be able to provide her milk to the Haldar's progeny, but as soon as there is no child to rear, Jasoda is forced to ask for financial aid from her husband. When she finds herself neglected everywhere, she gets the job of a cook at the same family, but soon she has been discovered breast cancer patient. She had been forcefully admitted into one hospital; after her death, no child, fed by her breast, came to pay its homage to her, and finally she is cremated by an untouchable. Jasoda's relatives painlessly reject her during her illness because she does not measure up to their image of mother. In their view, mother is healthy, homely and strong personality. The shriveled, comatose woman with striking flesh of her breast is as good as dead to them. Thus, despite having reared fifty children, Jasoda dies alone. Her breast becomes an inscription of violence for she is exploited, revered and rejected with reference to them. 'Breast-giver' is a challenge issued to the miscalculated assumption of western feminism about childbirth and child-rearing being an unwaged domestic labour, but to the traditional Indian society, Jasoda, the milk-mother, signifies her 'applied divinity'. An analysis of 'Breast giver' thus reveals the way in

which patriarchal ideology in alliance with capitalism traps the human body into a system of domination endlessly repeated throughout history.

The last story of the Mahasweta Devi's Breast series entitled 'Behind the Bodice' once again conceptualizes the mangled breasts of Gangor as a metaphor of the violence, especially custodial, that has become on everyday occurrence in our democratic India. The story opens with a thought-provoking statement of the writer herself:

'What is there' was the national problem that year. When it became a national issue, the other fuck-ups of that time e.g. crop failure-earthquake, everywhere clashes between so called terrorists and state power and therefore killing, the beheading of a young man and woman in Haryana for the crime of marrying out of caste, the unreasonable demands of Medha Patkar and others around the Narmada Dam, hundreds of rape-murder-lock up torture etc. Non-issues which by natural law approached but failed to reach highlighting in the newspaper all this remained non-issues. Much more important than this was *Choli Ke Piche* behind the bodice.⁹

This story describes the tragedy that unfolds after ace-photographer Upin Puri caught a snap of the breasts of a migrant labourer named Gangor while she is nursing her child. The exposure of her breast makes her the object of disgust in her own community as well as a sexual object in the eyes of the police. Upin is an urban man or photographer who relies on the violence occurring in backward and rural areas of Bihar and Orissa to earn his livelihood. His picture of Gangor appears in the National Press, which invites a disaster to her life. After some time, Gangor gets disappeared from the place. The caretaker of the house, in which Upin, Ujan and Shital live, tells them

Gangor is a vagabond young lady who moves from place to place in search of money. Gangor has been kidnapped by the police who feel themselves provoked by that photograph. Finally, Gangor has been found in a brothel, playing the role of a prostitute. As the incident comes to the attention of media, Gangor's case reaches court. On the day of the hearing of the case, a group of tribal women, led by activist, Medha, tear off their blouses on the court premises to mark their protest against the police brutality. In his essay, 'Critique of violence', Walter Benjamin highlights the law-preserving violence that is conservative, protective and threatening, designed to preserve or reinforce a pre-existing legal order.¹⁰ But the legal order too is infested with patriarchy. The violence of the police exposes the measures that ensure domination of the other in the phallogocentric society. The raw and bitten breasts of Gangor signify that it is criminal to ask the question about the breasts that lie behind the piece of cloth, for these breasts provide an image of the harsh reality about the lives of the Subaltern. The rape of the aboriginal Gangor by the police signifies the rape, torture, humiliation, manipulation and exploitation carried out by the institutions and protectors of law.

IV

As a humanist, Mahasweta Devi has the ability to communicate, across languages and cultures, the simplest, the starkest realities of the lives of India's dispossessed which left many in awe. As Devi confesses:

I have always believed that the real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, in various forms, of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people across generations... 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 elsewhere, once I have started knowing them? Sometimes it seems to me that my writing is really their doing.¹¹

Devi's language traversed a wide range, incorporating styles of Bengali from all strata of society, including a hybrid Bihari- inflected dialect. Her vocabulary was wonderfully, widely varied; her tone elliptical terse, often sardonic; her humor with pathos. Her style was tough, yet we get unexpected passage of intense lyricism. She reacted her own class, the bourgeoisie who disgusted with their hypocrisy and inhumanity.

In her literary tribute to Mahasweta Devi, Anjum Katyal says that Devi is one of the most remarkable writers and social activists of India who fought through her writings for the rights of those most downtrodden and oppressed in our society- the migrant and the destitute, tribals and dalits, communities written off as criminals and marginals She walked and walked through villages and rural India, familiarizing herself with the structure of power and governance, identifying with those robbed off their right, seeking material for her novels and stories. She found the so-called savage and backward people incredibly civilized and cultured. It was her own class, the bourgeoisie, who disgusted her with their hypocrisy and inhumanity... She built her reputation for integrity and fearlessness by standing her ground and speaking her mind in the face of displeasure and pressure from those in power; but this reputation was soiled in the last five years or so, her choices criticized by many. I prefer to remember her as she was when she was at her most productive and prolific. I prefer to remember the Mahasweta Di who tilted at Windmills. Fought dragons. Championed

the underdogs. And turned the most wretched of the down trodden into epic heroines and legendary heroes with the magic of her pen.¹² Finally, we must pay or tribute to the dedicated, intellectual genius of Mahasweta Devi, Who established her reputation as the bold voice of silent, suffering humanity, with the words of The Indian Express:

Devi won the Sahitya Akademi and Jnanpith Awards for literary excellence, while the Ramon Magsaysay award and the Padma Vibhushan also recognize the political import of her work, both as writer and activist. Her best-known stories were agitprop. In his forthcoming book, *The Great Derangement* Amitav Ghosh notes ruefully that authors turn instinctively to nonfiction to address political issues like climate change. But Politics including environmental politics – informs the creative work of Devi, analyzing the countervailing forces of nature and civilization, history and modernization. It is a unique thread in the story of Indian literature, drawing on the diverse worlds of India's tribals, dalits, women and peasantry- the vanquished of history. She has listened closely to them, amplified their concerns and brought them to the attention of the main stream. This ability to turn subaltern lives into fictional polemic, the ease with which she made the personal the political, was her legacy to modern India.¹³

As a student and teacher of literature, I wish that her stories become part of the collective conscience of India.

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Dr. Vinita Jha, Professor & Head, P.G. Department of English, MDDM Collage (CPE Status), BRA Bihar University, Muzaffarpur.

The Downcast and the Downtrodden : A Study in Mahasweta Devi's "Dhouli"

Dr. Neeraj Kumar

Abstract :

Mahasweta Devi has been a social activist fighting for justice to the marginalized, dispossessed, tribal communities in India. Her writings portray women as sufferers of the politics of gender, class and caste played at various levels of social relationships. They are marked with social-consciousness and commitment with a strong urge to improve the situation. Women always experience a continuous trauma under male subjugation. She does not write as a feminist but as a human being who narrates the realities of human trauma. She explicates the problems of women and the misery they undergo in a male-dominated society and presents them in her works like *Mother of 1084*, *Breast Stories*, *Bitter Soil*, *Titu Mir*, *Outcast* etc. The present paper will focus on depicting the life of Dhouli, the chief protagonist in the story with the same name. In this story we find various instances of women suppression under patriarchal system and caste and class ridden society.

Key words : Marginalized; dispossessed; tribal communities; brutality; male-dominated society.

Mahasweta Devi, one of the leading women writers of India has been the winner of several national awards like Sahitya Akademi, Jnanpith, Padmashree, Raman Magsaysay and many others for her plays, novels, short stories etc. She has been a social activist fighting for justice to the marginalized, dispossessed, tribal communities in India. Her writings portray women as sufferers of the politics of gender, class and caste played at various levels of social relationships. Her

stories are a study in brutality and degradation wreaked on women for centuries. She is one of the great Indian writers of our time who write with a view to exposing the evils inherent in the socio-economic and political system of the post-colonial India. Her writings are marked with social-consciousness and commitment with a strong urge to improve the situation. She in a way emerges as a champion of the proletariat landless labourers, peripherals, the poor and the subaltern class of Indian society.

Women in our society are always looked down upon and are considered as inferior human beings. Since ages, they have been crushed by the male-dominated society. Women always experience a continuous trauma under male subjugation. Ram Ahuja has rightly observed :

In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favour of women in our society after independence the spread of education and women's gradual economic independence, countless women still continue to be victims of violence. They are beaten, kidnapped, raped, burnt and murdered. (Ahuja 1997, 243)

Woman has been a victim to both psychological and physical affliction. Mahasweta Devi focuses on different phases of suffering the women undergo in the society. She does not write as a feminist but as a human being who narrates the realities of human trauma. She explicates the problems of women and the misery they undergo in a male-dominated society and presents them in her works like *Mother of 1084*, *Breast Stories*, *Bitter Soil*, *Titu Mir*, *Outcast* etc. Dhouli is a victim of the most severe kind of exploitation in Indian society. At the outset she is seen standing in front of Parasnath's shop at Taharr around eight at night. She is a dusad, an untouchable by caste. She comes back

to her hut where a dibri (small oil lamp) is burning and her mother is lying on the bed. She drinks some water, shuts the door, blows out the lamp and lays down beside her mother :

Tears seeped from her eye. Tears of deep despair. Her mother could hear; she understood everything. Dhoulī kept crying... (Devi 2015, 3)

Dhoulī is one of such dalit women who are tortured at the hands of upper class. The Misras, the so-called elite class of the society have not only ruined her but also some other girls belonging to the lower castes like Dusad, ganju, dhobi etc. Though Dhoulī had somewhat faith in Misrilal, her mother was dead sure that he would not come back to take care of her. She was also certain that if he came and took care of them after the birth of the child, it would be well, otherwise there would be a mess. Dhoulī was in love with Misrilal - fair-skinned, curly hair, innocent and good looking, who according to her was a deota. Dhoulī, on the contrary was a dusad's daughter, a widow, an unfortunate woman. Kundan, Misrilal's brother had an evil eye on Dhoulī. It was because of "her tremendous eyes, her slender waist, her blossoming breasts.(7) She swept the orchard, keeping herself carefully covered with her coarse sari and took home only the guavas and custard apples that were half eaten by the birds and lambs.

Mahasweta Devi, through her short stories tries to bring to light the atrocities against the dalit women, where women are stripped of their honour and compassion and are treated as a 'commodity'. Dhoulī too, is treated in the same fashion. As she was a widow, she was not allowed to look in a mirror, to wear shellac bangles, a dot of sindoor on her forehead. Though she was attractive, she could not marry again; nor she could sing wedding songs. However, she did not

remember when she was married. Her father had died repaying the loan which he had taken for the marriage of his daughter. She was very much conscious of the social gap-she was a dusadin and Misrilal was a Brahmin. She whenever got a chance asked him very politely not to play games with her. One day when she heard that Misrilal was seriously ill, she was quite disturbed. The whole village knew about their affair. Hanuman Misra, the father of Misrilal asked his elder son, Kundan to deny them food, sack them and restore their honour. He is more conscious of his respect and honour. Even the upper-caste women encouraged their sons to indulge in such acts :

The men of our family have planted their seed in so many dusad and ganju girls. You're a hot-blooded young man. Even Jhalo has three sons by Kundan.(13)

and considered the women only responsible for the whole affair,

It's always the fault of the woman. For not considering a brahman's honour, she's even more to blame.(14)

Moreover it was a regular practice for the upper castes to ruin the lives of the girls belonging to dalit class. But it was always the women who had to bear the brunt of the society. Here too the whole responsibility lies with Dhoulī. Her kins folk had rejected her because she was not supposed to fall in love and she had fallen in love and that too, with a Brahmin boy, ignoring the men of her community. There were several illegitimate Misra children growing up in the dusad-ganju-dhobhi quarters. Such mothers and their children, if supported by the Misras, were treated well by the villagers, otherwise they were blamed and even thrown out of the villages.

The love between Dhoulī and Misrilal was intense. The latter brought so many things to Dhoulī, which she accepted with pride. She knew it well that he was not like other Misras and a day would come when he would marry her. On the contrary, Misrilal had his own limitations. He loved her too much, no doubt, but could not go beyond the wishes of his family. His helplessness is apparent when he says:

Dhoulī, my beloved, why were you born a dusadin? (15)

Misrilal told her that he was leaving the village for one month and in his absence his mother would look after her and her needs. But when Dhoulī's mother went to Misrilal's house, she insulted her. She without a word of protest came back fuming and beat her daughter mercilessly. Dhoulī did not utter a single word and handed her a sickle saying,

Here use this. Your hands must be tired. Besides, just one stroke will do the trick. It's very sharp. (17)

Indeed, her mother, though loved her daughter very much was disturbed by the impending doom and so repeatedly asked her to abort the child. She knew it fully well that Misrilal would not come back. Since they were in a way boycotted by their community, it had become difficult for them to earn their livelihood. Four months passed but Misrilal did not return. Dhoulī during this period relived everything; she remembered every little detail-“Misrilal had said once if it was a boy he would name it Murari.”(18) Ultimately her son was born at the end of Ashwin with the help of Shanichari, the midwife. She was the village gossip and medicine woman. She was somehow moved by Dhoulī's plight and decided to raise public opinion in her favour. She very soon informed Misrilal's mother

that Dhoulī had given birth to a son and she further added that he looked exactly as her son. She tolerated Sanichari because of her potions which helped keep her old and promiscuous husband under control. She had different plan regarding her son - he was going to be married to someone else. When Dhoulī came to know about it she was shocked. The people of her community were also not in favour of Dhoulī as she had spurned the men of her own caste. So everybody was waiting for the moment when Misrilal would do something for her. Later when he entered the village leading the baraat, he did not even raise his head. Everywhere in the village there were celebrations. New clothes, sweets, liquor were freely distributed in the dusad, ganju and dhobi neighbourhoods. But Dhoulī was totally indifferent to all this. She only wanted to meet Misrilal and when he came to meet her, she felt that he was still attracted to her. There was some misunderstanding created by his mother between him and Dhoulī. Misrilal was not as bold as his elder brother, Kundan who had given Jhalo, another Dusadin girl, sons, a house and a piece of land. So he could not own Dhoulī completely. Dhoulī, on the contrary was threatening him saying that if he failed to send her money in future, she would directly hand over his son to him. Dhoulī was so angry at Misrilal's cowardice that she could not control herself:

You've ruined my life deota. Does it hurt to hear a few home truths? Or are all rich people like you so thin-skinned? (25)

She asked her mother to shift to Bhalatore and there if necessary, she would sell herself.

With the passage of time Dhoulī's son started growing up on scraps and scrapings. Mahasweta Devi has portrayed typical Indian people who are more

concerned about the other's state of affairs than their own. They did not have the courage to ask anything from Dhoulis but they breathed a sigh of relief to realize that Misrilal had washed his hands off the whole thing. Even Dhoulis attempt to work somewhere to earn her livelihood was failed as nobody was ready to employ her thinking that if anybody gave her a job, the so-called upper caste would be annoyed. Her mother too, lost her patience:

Wretched female, if you can't do anything else,
why don't you kill yourself.(27)

Dhoulis, being hurt by this tried to commit suicide by drowning herself under the same waterfall, where she used to wait for Misrilal. But her fate had planned something else for her. She also compromised with the situation and joined the flesh trade. She asked her mother to go along with the baby and sleep with Sanichari. For the first time she wore one of the printed saris, Misrilal had given to her, rubbed some oil into her scalp, took a bath and groomed her hair. In this way she had learnt how to survive in this world. She had become too much conscious of her identity-she gave her customers their money's worth and also warned them not to come empty-handed. After so many days their life changed-they wore proper clothes and ate two square meals a day. Kundan was burning from inside thinking that 'that dusadin had become a coveted female'. He directly went to Dhanbad and conveyed everything to Misrilal. Kundan was a bit delighted as his brother still had a soft spot for that female and he had succeeded in rubbing salt in his wound. Misrilal came to Taharr burning with rage and venom and entered Dhoulis room. To his utter surprise he found everything in a changed situation - a lantern instead of a dibri, a fresh rug and pillow on the machan and a sack of maroa and a container of oil under it. When

he asked her why she did not die, she said angrily,

...why should I? You can get married, run a shop, see movies with your wife, and I have to kill myself? Why? Why? Why?(32)

When she fumes further and says that he is not man enough, his male ego is hurt and he says that he will show her that he was both a man and a brahman's son, too. Then summoning a panchayat meeting the order relating to her banishment from the village was passed and it was accepted by one and all. Next day Kundan's contractor escorted her to Ranchi:

...Dry tearless eyes. Totally shattered. As if her mind had stopped functioning. Mechanical movement. A puppet controlled by the will of others.
(33)

Dhoulis while leaving asked her mother to keep some gur with her and whenever the child cries at night, put some into his mouth. She also asked her to leave a lamp lit at night as he is scared of the dark. When her mother suggested her to stay with Misrilal's brother, Kundan and there was no need of leaving the village, she retorted that she was going to be a professional whore instead of a private one. And by doing this she would be a part of a community. Here, the writer has tried to prove that the collective strength of the society was far more powerful than an individual's strength. Dhoulis had an acute sense of hatred against the Misras. She was full of tears as everything was going to be changed in her life. However, Nature was unaffected by the upheaval in her life. She realized that for girls like herself, nature accepted such a fate as natural.

The writer has realistically presented the atrocities suffered by Dhoulis in the andro-centric society. Besides, being a dalit, she also became the victim of

the class gap in the society. Mahasweta Devi aims at improving the tribal condition without destroying their own culture. Through her short stories in general and this story “Dhouli” in particular, she has tried to bring to light the atrocities against the tribal women, where women are stripped of their honour and compassion and are treated as a commodity. It is the physical, emotional, psychological rape that forces a woman to be stripped from the spirit and stand alone stark naked after the humiliation and pain. The story is marked with paradigm of dialectics of the dominance and resistance between the oppressor and the oppressed, the central and the peripheral, the haves and the have-nots. The writer has also highlighted the age-old beliefs related to a widow what they are supposed to do and what not. Dhouli from the beginning has been portrayed as revolting against the social set-up, though to improve her lot was beyond her power. Her moving away from the village to the market place in Ranchi is a slur on the face of the society which claims to be a part of socialist, secular Republic state with justice, social, economic and political rights to its citizens and assuring the dignity of human life. What we find is that though we have become free from the shackles of the long-drawn slavery of the English, the socio-economic justice is still a day-dream in the lives of common masses, especially the sub-alterns. The gap between the ruler and the ruled, the upper-caste and the lower-caste has widened; the slavery still persists-only its form has changed. And the only reason is our mindset. In our minds we are still slaves in one way or the other.

Mahasweta Devi has also focused on the typical Indian society with its peculiar form of caste system which divides human beings into higher caste and lower caste. Dalits were commonly segregated and

banned from full participation in Hindu social life. But with the spread of education, Dalits have started expressing their aversion for and anger against the established unequal social system in their writings. Mahasweta Devi surpasses all other Dalit writers-Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy and even Aravind Adiga as hers is a more pungent attack on the society. On the one hand, she expresses the mindset of the Brahmans - “You should have fun with every dalit female and at the same time keep everyone under your control” (31), while on the other hints at the inherent strength of Dhouli when she decides to become “a professional whore instead of a private one” (33). It was a way of revolting against the social norms prevalent in our society. She is closer to Baby Kamble and Omprakash Valmiki who, too in their writings *The Prisons We Broke* and *Joothan* respectively have portrayed the ugly faces of our society. To conclude we can say that the Indian constitution though gives equal rights to all human beings, the attitude and social behaviour towards dalits have not changed even today.

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Dr. Neeraj Kumar, Professor, P.G. Dept. of English & Research Centre, Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya (Bihar)

Pictures of Social Issues in the Works of Mahasweta Devi

Dr. (Smt.) Lakshmi Kumari

Abstract

Mahasweta Devi is known as a social activist and writer for the cause of tribal people especially women and all dalit people in general in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh. In her fiction she often narrates the brutal oppression faced by the tribal people at the hands of the powerful upper caste persons comprising landlords, money lenders and government officials. As a feminist she has written against gender injustice and exploitation of women. Her *Breast Stories* presents a sizzling account of men's atrocities against women. The paper explores vividly the socio-political issues in the works of Mahasweta Devi.

Key words : elite, privileged, stigma, empathy, tyranny.

Mahasweta Devi is like a gem in the literary world. Her works touch the deeper and rarer aspects of the tribals of India. A nation so wide and full of varieties needs a writer like Mahasweta Devi who possesses the ability to look into the deep down the heart and mind of the people and could bring out the feelings, dreams, aspirations, problems and challenges which they face in day to day life but are still not known to the common lot. Mahasweta Devi is known to have been studying the life history of rural tribal communities in the Indian state of West Bengal and also women and dalits. Mahasweta Devi was a social activist who wholly involved herself to work for the struggles of the tribal people in states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In the fiction themed on Bengal which Devi writes, she often narrates the brutal oppression faced by the tribal people

at the hands of the powerful upper caste persons comprising landlords, money lenders and government officials in this belt. Apart from these aspects Mahasweta Devi has always kept a keen eye on the female perspective in her works. One can find many works in the world of literature talking about the females who belong to middle class, under privileged, elite class so on and so forth but the pains which Mahasweta Devi has taken in her works to describe the females of tribal section is something which has been noticed very rarely. In the modern age the whole world has realized the women are the cause of the origin of life and hence she is a subject to be respected, loved and cared. The writers of different countries, castes, societies and religions have always kept the female as the nucleus of their works. On the one hand where Shakespeare has unfurled various aspects of the female through his unmatched creations like Desdemona, Portia, Miranda and so on and so forth, on the other hand we have writers like Sheridan, Shaw, Austen, T.S Eliot, Gordimer, Achebe, Premchand, Sarojini Naidu and one cannot overlook the fact that the list of such writers is endless in the field of literature. Among such precious names the name of Mahasweta Devi possesses a special place. She has talked about the females, their social position in the tribal society so boldly in her works that was hardly ever seen before. Even in the modern age India cannot be called a modern country, she still has a large number of tribal castes who even in the present context of time are struggling for the brighter aspects of life. These tribals have to struggle for gaining the respect which, being a human is their birth right. In the present context of time when the whole world is moving ahead towards technology, better education, comfortable life Mahasweta Devi throws light on that aspect of Indian society which is still deprived of all the facilities, comfort and education.

There are two pictures of modern India; the first one shows us the bright picture of India shining while the second one is a grim picture of India reeling under poverty, hunger, debt and unemployment. The first picture shows consistent growth in every field, be it education, healthcare, industry, service sector etc. This picture tries to project India as a nation continuously moving on the path of progress. The other picture puts a question mark on the reality behind the first picture. In the same nation called India we have millions of landless farmers reeling under poverty and debt; tribals who are losing their land and are forced to become farm workers (or bonded labourers in many cases) and common man who are making die-hard efforts to make their ends meet. But the tragedy with these people is that their life is beyond the radar of national attention. Mahasweta Devi today stands as a distinct category in Indian literature. Unlike her contemporaries, especially those writing in Bengali, her identity as a woman is not integral to her writings. Her subjects and language have transcended the boundaries of stereotype and gender. Her women are strong; they have a tremendous sense of self-respect and are prepared to fight all their battles to the end, even if the end is death. On the other hand, her contemporaries and seniors document a different woman's world altogether. Giribala Devi, Jyotirmoyee Devi. Ashapura Devi, Lila Majumdar, Pratibha Basu's women are all limited and constrained by the constructed walls of society. The politics of women's oppression and subjugation is totally absent from their writings. All these writers limit themselves within the social boundaries constructed by patriarchal society.

Mahasweta Devi one of the foremost writers of modern time, is more concerned about the second picture rather than the first one. Mahasweta Devi today stands as a distinct category in Indian literature.

Unlike her contemporaries, especially those writing in Bengali, her identity as a woman is not integral to her writings. Her subjects and language have transcended the boundaries of stereotype and gender. Her women are strong; they have a tremendous sense of self-respect and are prepared to fight all their battles to the end, even if the end is death. The world of Mahasweta's women is not limited to cooking, eating or sleeping. Their struggle for life and existence and for justice and identity continues alongside their men and alongside thousands of others in the same position. Beyond their social identities of wife, lover, daughter and mother, these women are human beings inhabiting and struggling for their rights in a society far removed from the purview of the urban middle class. Her female characters are far stronger than the male ones. Her females are so deeply involved in every minute aspect of family, society and human life.

The first five stories by Mahasweta Devi are set in southeastern Bihar. These stories in majority talk about semi landless tribals and untouchables effectively denied the rights which are actually made for them by the government. Her plots and storylines, she often said, were based on actual events. Yet she found a way of lifting them to a mythic level, imbuing them with a universal relevance that rendered them literature rather than reportage. Her language traversed a wide range, incorporating styles of Bengali from all strata of society, including a hybrid Bihari-inflected dialect. Her vocabulary was wonderfully, wildly varied; her tone elliptical, terse, often drily sardonic; her humour, black. Hers was a tough, lean style, with unexpected passages of intense lyricism. Mahasweta Devi concentrates on the socio-economic situation which is polarized, agitated and violent with the capitalist form of exploitation reinforcing the old forms of oppression by high-caste landlords and

moneylenders. Apart from all these stigmas of Indian society Mahasweta Devi also brought the newly cropped up problems of Indian society into the lime light such as politicians seeking votes, officials supposedly protecting the underdogs, radical city youths trying to forge link with rustic comrades. The tribals and the untouchables tyrannized and exploited by the landlords and money-lenders, deceived and let down by double dealing. Her famous work '*Paddy Seeds*' reveals a storm which is gathering and then raging as the poor outcastes demand the legal minimum wages from the Rajput landlords, who own hundreds of acres, ten guns, a private army of thugs, and the passive connivance of the local police. The protagonist, violently jolted from the side-line into the eye of storm, is actually a wise old man who had prominent marks of wrinkles on his face. His crafty personal battle of wits with the powerful, manipulative obsequiousness, is not unlike the strategies of indirect personal power that women learn to deploy to counteract patriarchal domination. When he finds himself trapped in the landlord's diabolical scheme, he finally deploys his cunning, his only tool of personal survival, in a solitary guerrilla war on his personal and class enemy. It is a story of despair as well as hope. It is a story of rebellion against tyranny at several levels like personal, social, economic and even cultural.

Right from her first novel '*The Queen of Jhansi*' the depiction of the female chivalry for the protection of her empire and her nation. The characters of Mahasweta Devi were very close to that aspect of society possessing those sentiments and feelings which often goes unobserved. One of the famous works of Mahasweta Devi '*Hazaar Chaurasir Maa*' exhibits the character of 'Sujata' who proves the above statement. Sujata is an unhappy wife and mother, where her husband, Dibyanath uses her only to give birth to their children. The children do not care for her, except Brati.

Brati was an unwanted child to Sujata. However, when the mother in her could not hate him he turned to be the only hope of her. One day, she got a shocking news that Brati was brutally murdered as he was a Naxal. Using the power, Dibyanath prevented the news flashing through paper etc., and considered him as a closed chapter. Sujata on the other hand, tried to live in the memory of the son and tried to understand her son's decision to choose such a path and those images become close to the mother. The novel clearly serves two purposes. On the one hand where it gives different faces of a 'mother' on the other hand it highlights the grave situation which gives birth to the naxal movement and the need to give human consideration to them are stressed. The climax of the novel clearly shows the response the motherly feelings receive in an unjust society. At the same time, the mother in Mahasweta Devi is a failure, if we look from the ordinary day standard. She does not succeed in keeping her husband only to her, could not prevent her children from getting spoiled. Here, the author's merit is to give a believable account which generates empathy in readers. The novel is among those honest efforts of the writer where to show the image of the females based on morals as heard or explained since the ancient times or in our mythology, she attempts to present a realistic image of the females and that too on the practical grounds.

Mahasweta Devi's another creation 'Draupadi' is also heart touching presentation of the female on the realistic ground. Like most of her stories, "Draupadi" is set among the tribals in Bengal. The hard life stories of the tribals who are oppressed by the moneylenders and landlords, condescended to by the government, aided in uselessly inappropriate ways by charity groups and well-meaning city people, are described in her distinctively matter-of-fact style. Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi, is a rebel, hunted down by the government

in their attempt to subjugate the revolutionary groups. The government uses all forces available to them, including kidnapping, murder, and rape, and any tribal deaths in custody are invariably reported as "accidents". The story ends with a magnificent final scene in which Dopdi faces her abusers, naked and bloody, but fiercely strong. We read about the resistance shown by such women as attachment to land that they inhabit, and their refusal to be dispossessed, displaced, disinherited, etc. We can understand the manner in which "tribals" might relate to the land they labour on, and whether "tribal" women in particular display specific structures of attachment by a close reading of this story in the background of Indian epic the Mahabharata. This paper would critique the life of the tribal Dopdi and the mythic Draupadi of the Mahabharata as both seem to have struggled for their legitimate rights, snatched by the establishment, throughout their life. The depth which she has touched in dealing with the females is not the only salient feature of Mahasweta Devi's work rather I must say that she was capable enough to touch and feel the pains of every class, community and religion. Throughout her literary career she had always been a bold speaker for all those social and human aspects which were in the real sense supposed to be the responsibility of the government.

The short story "Little Ones" is an unusual narrative which describes the unsettling encounter between the relief officer and the Aagariyan tribe in a famine struck village. This relief officer has been named Mr Singh who has been sent to help and, in the long term rehabilitate the tribal. This story has elements of a ghost story and of a social documentary. Mahasweta Devi has tried to describe what lack of nutrition and starvation has done to the human body. This is exactly what happens in the story. The "little ones", who are described as supernatural kids are in reality adult Aagariya, shrunk in size. A prolific and best-selling author of novels and short stories in

Bengali, Mahasweta is equally known for her pioneering work among the most downtrodden in the Indian society - the dispossessed tribal population and the marginalized segments such as the landless labourers of eastern India. The quarterly *Bortika* that she has been editing since 1980 has been a mouthpiece for these people. Her writings are based upon meticulous research, conducted sometimes via unconventional means (such as oral traditions), into the history of the people she writes about. Her writings can be divided into three phases. Her early works like *Jhansir Rani* (1956), *Amrita Sanchay* (1964), *Titu Mir and Andha Malik* (1967) have the British colonial period as the backdrop. The next phase of her writings is greatly influenced by the Naxalite movement of the 1960's and 1970's.

Mahasweta Devi is among those rarest writers who dare to build her reputation for integrity and fearlessness by standing her ground and speaking her mind in the face of displeasure and pressure from those in power. Mahasweta Devi has made important contribution to literary and cultural studies in this country. Her empirical research into oral history as it lives in the cultures and memories of tribal communities was a first of its kind. Her powerful, haunting tales of exploitation and struggle have been seen as rich sites of feminist discourse by leading scholars. Her innovative use of language has expanded the conventional borders of Bengali literary expression. Standing as she does at the intersection of vital contemporary questions of politics, gender and class, she is a significant figure in the field of socially committed literature.

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Dr. (Smt.) Lakshmi Kumari. Professor in English, Vaishali Mahila Mahavidyalay, BRA BU, Muzaffarpur

From Confinement to Emancipation: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*

Sweta Kumari

Abstract

Women have always been seen as playing the role of a mother, wife, and daughter and so on down the centuries. If we go through the history of women's condition within family or society, we find that they have never been treated equally with men in terms of their dignity, career, and their presence in the family or society. In this way, women often found themselves confined and chained in playing these stereotype roles. But after the death of her loving son, Brati who was the only reason for her living, makes her a revolting and matured woman later on. As a result, she becomes a revolting and daring one after facing the realities of the family and society, who does not tolerate the tortures and restrictions imposed on her anymore. Thus, she emerged as an emancipated woman breaking the shackles of conventional society. The paper is an attempt to trace and evaluate the protagonist's journey from servitude to emancipation passing through the phase of suffering and resistance. It also examines the self growth of Sujata, the mother protagonist.

Key words: Emancipation, alienation, dissatisfaction, identity, stereotype.

Mahasweta Devi is a prolific Bengali writer, journalist, a social activist and an eminent writer. She was born in Dhaka but migrated to India after partition. Mahasweta Devi was profoundly active in working for the betterment of the tribal communities and she worked extensively for them. Therefore, the main source of inspiration behind her writing were those people, who were victims of exploitation and

oppression in the semi-colonial Indian society. As a social activist, she had always raised her voice against the injustice in terms of their suffering and discrimination. But the fact is that she fought not only with the tools of language for these exploited people but also wandered in villages, forests, small or big towns and made them aware of the necessity of struggle for their own dignity and basic human rights. Like this, she became a hope for those thousands of such people and formed more than thirty organizations of different tribal groups in many parts of India. In the following passage, Mahasweta Devi herself revealed her role as a creative writer, social activist and her political consciousness:

The sole purpose of my writing is to expose the many faces of exploiting agencies...My experience keeps me perpetually angry and makes me ruthlessly unforgiving towards the exploiters, or the exploiting system. That the mainstream remains totally oblivious of the tribal situation further that burning anger... believe in anger, in justified violence, and so peel the mask off the face of the India which is projected by the government, to expose its naked brutality, savagery, and caste and class exploitation; and place this India, a Hydra-headed monster, before a people's court, the people being the oppressed million. (Mahasweta, 29)

Mahasweta Devi wrote about a hundred novels and twenty collections of short stories. She wrote all her works primarily in Bengali but they were translated into other languages later on. Her first novel was *Jhansir Rani* (1956) which was based on the life of Rani of Jhansi. Moreover, her major works are *Hazar Churashir Maa* (1974), *Aranyer Adhikar* (1979), *Murti* (1979), *Neerete Megh* (1979), *Stanyadayani* (1980), and *Chotti Munda Evan Tar Tir* (1980). These were translated into other languages as well. She was awarded many literary honours such as Sahitya Akademi Award (1979),

Jnanpith Award (1996), Padam Shree (1986), and Magsaysay Award (1997).

The novel, *Mother of 1084* was originally entitled as *Hazar Churashir Maa*, which was written in the year 1973 and it was published in the year 1974. The story of the novel begins with the time flame of the day. Mahasweta's *Mother of 1084* is divided into four sections in four phases of the day- 'morning', 'afternoon', 'late-afternoon' and 'evening'. Each of the section of the novel is significant in itself, because each section is about Sujata's changes and development in terms of her awakening and consciousness as an individual. The first section, 'morning' opens with Sujata's recalling her past in the morning of January 17. On this day, Sujata's son Brati was born and at the same day he died. But the fact is that now, Sujata's daughter, Tuli's engagement is fixed on the same day of January 17.

The second section 'afternoon' starts with Sujata's visit to Somu's mother as Somu was Brati's friend and one of the comrades as well. Sujata comes to know from Somu's mother the reason behind Brati's and his friends' murder. Here, Sujata gets to know a different side of Brati's life as well, which brings a little bit change in Sujata's behaviour towards her family especially towards Dibyanath for finding the outside world totally different from her own house. In the third section, 'late-afternoon', Sujata is introduced with the real face of the system of the society by another comrade Nandini, who herself was the victim of the so-called system of the society for her Naxalite belief. Sujata is totally shocked and broken, when she realizes that how less she knew Brati. But she became stronger after meeting Nandini. The day of January 17 which she often remembers it as Brati's death day, but now she remembers this only as Brati's birth day after meeting Nandini. In the fourth and last section entitled 'evening', we get to see a new Sujata, who is

no more bothered about so-called society and family after her visit to Nandini. Whenever anyone questions her absence in the family, she fully revolts and against it does not understand it necessary to explain. But at the end of this novel, she dies of appendix at the ring ceremony of her younger daughter, Tuli. Thus, the paper will explore Sujata's journey from confinement to emancipation in Mahasweta's Devi's *Mother of 1084*.

The novel, *Mother of 1084* begins with Sujata, who is fifty three now. But, she goes back twenty-two years ago recalling her son. She often goes back to that morning and remembers from the moment of waiting for Brati to come in this world to the moment of giving birth to him. But, her husband Dibyanath was in Kanpur on business, when Brati was to born. In fact, he never cared for Sujata. But Sujata too neither shared her pain nor she groaned for that. She was herself a self-dependent woman. The following lines will explain this:

Still he had not made any arrangement for Sujata. He never did. The first pain came in the bathroom, and Sujata trembled all over. The sight of blood frightened her. She packed up all her things herself, and asked the cook to call a taxi. (Mahasweta2)

Sujata did not give up her hope for Brati, and she went herself to the nursing home. The doctor questions her for not coming with her husband. Sujata was surprised hearing this as she never expected her husband to come even if he had been in town. Dibyanath was never with her whenever she needed his company in time. He frequently slept in a room on the second floor in order to escape the cries of the new born baby so that his sleep may not be disturbed. Even he never asked if the children were ill. He only wanted to be sure that 'Sujata was fit enough to bear a child again or not' (3). If Dibyanath used to show his concern

regarding her health, it could have only one meaning that how could the doctor come to know anything about Dibyanath? Like this, Sujata felt alienated in the house in spite of having a complete family. It seems that her existence in the house is meant for nothing but only for giving birth to the child. She feels herself neglected:

She felt herself violated and defiled throughout the nine months. The body gathering weight seemed a curse. But the moment she realized that her life and the child's was in danger, she felt a surge of compassion. Sujata had at once called for the doctor. She asked him, please operate. Save the child. (3)

This was the moment Sujata became more attached with Brati. She had a special bond with him among all her five children. But here again Sujata goes back to her past recalling telephone ring. Sujata gets shocked and fainted hearing impersonal officer's voice, who asks her to come to Kantapukur to identify her son, Brati's dead body. But she even gets more shocked when Dibyanath does not allow her to go by his own car to Kantapukur so that his reputation and prestige may not be at stake.

Moreover, he does not accompany Sujata to Kantapukur. He says that he has to go somewhere for some urgent work. Sujata gets to see the real face of her husband, Dibyanath that day. Sujata is completely shattered to see this side of Dibyanath that what else can be important in his life than his own children. Perhaps, all the pain and suffering she could have tolerated but she couldn't tolerate his ignorance here towards Brati who was so dear to Sujata. Dibyanath also died for Sujata the moment she came to know that Brati was no more. In fact, his behaviour took him far away from her. This was the turning point in Sujata's nature and thoughts which further results

into her protest against the restrictions imposed on her.

This was not enough for Dibyanath, he wanted to erase all the memories regarding Brati. So, he gets all his photographs removed from the corridor wall. He gets Brati's old shoes, and raincoat removed. But Sujata was not shocked to find as she was well aware of Dibyanath's taking decision like that. Sujata did not utter even a word for that. Now she has no interest at all in what Dibyanath does. She leaves for the bank quietly. Sujata joined the bank to support the family when Brati was there and Dibyanath had been facing some problems at his office. Sujata had also her own interest in taking the job. Because Sujata neither feels her existence as a mother, daughter-in-law nor as a wife, but finds herself chained and confined in the house. Sujata's neglected position in the house is the same here as we find with Sarita in Shashi Deshpande's novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The difference is that Sujata finds herself ignored among her in-laws' house while Sarita finds herself ignored among her own parents and family. But the result is that both the women have to go through the alienation which they find themselves living in a prison. Even Helene Cixous said "from the beginning of time oppression was the common lot of woman and labourer... woman was the first human being that tasted bondage, woman was a slave before the slave existed." (Preface. *Feminism: From Mary Wollstonecraft to Betty Friedan*) Thus Sujata's meaningless existence can be seen below:

Nobody had cared to understand why Sujata wanted to work, why she had made all the inquiries herself and found a job for herself. Dibyanath and his mother constituted the centre of attraction in the home. Sujata had a shadowy existence. She was subservient, silent, faithful and without an existence of her own. (9)

So, it is clear that the job was the need for Sujata in order to keep herself away from the house. Sujata wanted a life of her own choice where she could breathe freely. She never thinks of leaving her job. And it was second time she rebelled against Dibyanath's decision, since Sujata at first protested for giving birth to the fifth children when Brati was two. When the matter was resolved at Dibyanath's office he asked her to leave the job, but she didn't as she herself was not happy living in the house. The reason for keeping herself far away from the house can be seen here:

She had been taught by life to take things as they came. She had never thought of asking questions. She never knew that she had the right to ask questions. She had been hurt at times. Hurt badly. Dibyanath had always fooled around with women. (31)

Dibyanath was a hypocrite. On the one hand, he lectures about traditional values to Sujata while on the other he had himself some extra-marital relationship with other women. Moreover, he hardly had given the most common right to Sujata as a mother or wife. The household was under the control of Sujata's mother-in-law. Dibyanath could never know that one could have given respect to one's mother without humiliating one's own wife. But the fact is the mindset which was to keep his wife under his feet and his mother aloft. Here Dibyanath's thinking bears a close resemblance to what Simon de Beauvoir said in her book *The Second Sex* 'women have always been man's dependant, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality.' (Beauvoir 2011, 20). But it was Sujata's sensible nature that soon after her marriage she could realize pride and strong sense of dignity in keeping herself aloof from the household in order to satisfy others. Dibyanath's dominating nature

can be observed :

Of course, Dibyanath never cared to probe into these deep wounds. He was neither very attached nor indifferent to his wife. The way he saw it, a wife had to love, respect and obey her husband. A husband was not required to do anything to win his wife's respect, love and loyalty. He had built a house of his own, he kept servants, and that was enough he thought. He never tried to make a secret of his own affair with young girls outside the house. He felt it was within his rights. (45)

Dibyanath only reminds Sujata of her duties as a wife. Besides, he was well aware of the fact that all his children knew his infidelity towards Sujata. However, he did not feel even a bit of embarrassment. The fact was that Dibyanath knew that all 'his first three children would never defy him and that they considered all his actions part of his virility.' (45) Dibyanath's attitude towards Sujata reminds us of Nayantara Sahgal's novel, *The Day in Shadow*. In this novel, Som is similar to Dibyanath, who treats his wife Simrit as an object for his pleasure. Som treats her only as his possession, not as an individual due to which Simrit like Sujata has to suffer a lot.

The moment comes soon to Sujata when she thinks as a self-conscious individual rather as a housewife or a mother, since when she meets Nandini, a comrade and an activist of Naxalite Movement. Likewise, she realized that she knew nothing about her son Brati, who was murdered for his involvement in a Naxalite Movement. Here, Sujata came to know through Nandini about Brati why he believed no more in the so-called system of the society. She gets to see the true face of society. There grew disgust and hatred in Sujata as well. Sujata realizes that the society for which she had been silent and valued its tradition is in fact, good for nothing but merely an exposition. She

liberates herself the very moment from the conventions and its traditional values. The best example for this can be seen when Dibyanath questions her for being absent without information. On this Sujata replies curtly for she never questioned him for thirty two years where did he spend his evening. She declares openly his extra-marital affair with the ex-typist. She clearly says that 'she hates, detests the man, Dibyanath and the typist, Dibyanath and a distant cousin. Dibyanath and his cousin's wife.' (90) In fact, it was a smart slap on Dibyanath's face. Sujata had never behaved or spoken in such a manner, since thirtyfour years of their married life. This was not enough, she made him feel more humiliating which can be seen in the following lines:

When I was younger, I didn't understand. Then your mother covered up your sins- yes sins-and I didn't feel like raking things up. Then I had no interest to know. But I have never spent my time, like you, stealing away, slinking away from your home, from your family, the way you have done all your life. Would you like to hear more? (94)

To conclude, we can say that Sujata who was simple, kind-hearted and traditional Indian housewife in the beginning emerged as a new woman-courageous, brave, and bold later in the novel. In spite of having a job and being a self-dependent woman, she feels herself in a cage living a dishonoured and disgraced life. In other words, she finds herself to be confided in her own house. It is because of the conventional society, which does not allow her to free herself from the fetters of culture. A woman can bear all tortures at the hands of her husband or in-laws but when the question is about the self-respect or dignity as an individual, she can go to any extent to save it. In this novel, the case is the same with Sujata. She emancipates herself breaking the shackles from

the family and the conventional society, when she becomes fully aware of its reality and finds her self-respect and dignity at stake.

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Sweta Kumari, Research Scholar, P.G. Dept. of English, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya.

Parallels of Political Scenario and Political Issues in the Works of Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi

Amrita Singh

Abstract

Nadine Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi fall in the category of such writers who are bold, frank and transparent in expressing the loopholes and negativities of politics. Both India and South Africa have fought a long battle against slavery, hence, the literature of both the countries is highly influenced by the pain, struggle, deprivation suffered by the people due to colonialism. On the one hand if Gordimer was deeply related to the distressed psychology of the Blacks on the other Mahasweta Devi was closely aware of the tribals of India. When we scrutinize the theme of both the novelists, that is, Apartheid and Tribal challenge, we come to the conclusion that both Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi have dealt with that segment of their country who have been continuously working for the growth of their nation. The paper is basically an attempt to bring the deep down similarity present in both the writers while dealing with the feminism, politics and society.

Keywords:- Apartheid, Green life, Wet-nurse, Naxal, tribal.

Literature has always remained the incessant source of all the feelings, sentiments and emotions. We all have always co-related ourselves and our situations with literature sometimes through novel, drama, short story or poetry. It is the law of nature that every source inspires and originates something and every origination is the result of the inspiration and so is the case with literature. Literature inspires society and society inspires literature thus, enhancing the

growth and efficiency of each other. However, in this mutual contribution of development of literature and society we often forget politics, which acts like a catalyst in the relation of literature and society. The very names of the ages of English literature like Elizabethan Age, Victorian Age, Augustan Age so on and so forth clearly reveals how politics has been strongly influencing literature. In every age, the king or the queen had direct impact of their wishes on literature and according to their desire, various genres developed in different ages. Apart from the rulers, the political situation has always encouraged the pens and thoughts of the writers. The growth and development of Satire in the field of literature is a remarkable example of the role of politics in literature. Even after so many years of the publication of *Gulliver's Travel*, we still call it as one of the best political satires. For the literary personalities, no doubt politics has been one of the most favourite topics. The human society is guided, groomed and built up by the leaders, especially the political ones, because of having an extra edge in their personalities, thought process and undoubtedly the courage of executing new ideas and rules. The human world has witnessed many great political leaders whose contributions will be remembered till the doomsday. But unfortunately every coin has two sides; on the one hand if we had leaders like Stalin, Lenin, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose so on and so forth then we also have a long list of corrupt and manipulative leaders who have always used the human society, man power and economy merely for their personal growth. And here arises the responsibility of the literary figures to bring awareness among the common people so that they could not be misled and misguided by such corrupt leaders.

Both Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi have been in their writings thoroughly concerned with the political upheavals, changes and challenges because they belong to that category of people who know that society and politics cannot be kept apart. Literature is part and parcel of society and humans thus literature also establishes an intimate relation with politics. The triangular relation of literature, society and politics may seem strong but it is not an easy one to be maintained. It is quite easy to understand that to speak against the powers which are sitting on the influential posts of society is not an easy task. Therefore, the writers according to the situation and period kept on changing their style of expression. Sometimes through nature; as Rabindranath Tagore has done in the poem 'Where the mind is without fear', in which Tagore beautifully portrays the imagination of a country free from the chains of slavery and fear.

Earlier the writers often used comic touch, ironic style, satiric style to comment on the follies of politics and political persons. But with the passage of time the tyranny of the leaders decreased hence the writers became bolder, more frank and far more transparent in expressing the loophole and negativities of politics. Nadine Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi fall in the category of such writers. Though superficially both the writers belong to absolutely different background, culture, having different writing style and writing taste yet we find a whole lot of similarity in them. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the first and foremost concept of the human world being a home is very much initiated and proved by literature itself. This is the reason that we study and enjoy the literary works irrespective of the country from where it is related and the language in which it is written.

Mahasweta Devi, like other notable writers of India, has remained very close to the roots of Indian culture, people and society. Her works have been the mirror reflection of all the complex feelings, emotions and sentiments of common men. Perhaps that is why we are able to see our own reflection in her works. While going through the works of Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi I felt as if the ink and paper, that is, cultural background and situation, is different but the emotions and devotion of bringing awareness among the common people is the same. Both India and South Africa have fought a long battle against slavery, hence, the literature of both the countries is highly influenced by the pain, struggle, deprivation suffered by the people due to colonialism. On the one hand if Gordimer was deeply related to the distressed psychology of the Blacks on the other hand Mahasweta Devi was closely aware about the tribals of India. When we scrutinize the theme of both the novelists, that is, Apartheid and Tribal challenge, we come to the conclusion that both Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi have dealt with that segment of their countries that has been continuously working for the growth of their nation. These classes have never got the opportunity for education, better and comfortable life but their work area has ironically remained those that had pioneered the comfort of numerous people. All the labour class jobs which the tribals in India and the Blacks in South Africa have been doing have directly influenced the comfort of the so-called educated and elite class of both the nations who have remained indifferent to the plight of these under privileged section of their society. Undoubtedly, the works of Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi have played a pivotal role in awakening the sentiments towards these down trodden

classes. One of the notable works of Mahasweta Devi *Titu Mir* beautifully portrays the uprising future of India. In spite of being the son of a farmer Titu developed the zeal and fire for the struggle of freedom and the part that attracts us most is the skill of Titu that he had shown while training his cousins and other youth for revolt. Through this character Mahasweta Devi gives a picture of that India where the youth of every caste and community is aware and understands its fundamental rights and duties. The character portrayal of Titu Mir is a proof of the fact that she had deeply penetrated into the aspirations of the tribal youth. The very quality of understanding the desires and wishes of the youth of exploited class has been beautifully presented by Gordimer in her novel *Burger's Daughter*. If Mahasweta Devi shows her rebellious attitude by portraying a character of a son of a farmer who is simply not willing to carry forward the hereditary profession rather desires to come up as a revolutionary against the British rule, Gordimer shocks her reader by portraying the character of 'Rosie' the daughter of political activist having no inclination towards the politics and revolution. Both the writers have clearly shown the impact of political happenings in the society. A girl, Rosie of *Burger's Daughter*, who had lost her parents in the trails of imprisonment simply wants to be away from it yet her destiny brings her back to South Africa and she also ultimately gets involved in the political case and undergoes imprisonment. While the young boy of a farmer who had been witnessing his family indifferent towards the political happenings ultimately decides to jump into it and also motivates others. Thus, in spite of being the youth of different nation and background we see how political picture of one's society deeply affects one. In the same way

whether it is related to the grooming of our emotions, feelings, understanding the complexity of human nature or character we certainly look up to the literature.

These writers, apart from human nature and feelings, have deeply elaborated every aspect of feminism which in turn is a pivotal aspect of nature and literature. Both the writers have been very close to the various shades of female. Gordimer's portrayal of the image of a strong woman in the form of Julia Summers is well known to all. Julia shows the courage of leaving her country and stable life because of her love for Abdu and agrees to go to that country where even the natives have to struggle a lot to maintain the stability. Moreover, our respect for Julia increases more when she comes up as an inspiration for the other females of the house and at last denies leaving her in-laws' house with her husband for America with a strong hope of a 'Green Life' in Saudi Arabia. The list of such strong female characters is long in Gordimer's literary works but out of so many remarkable creations I would like to mention the character of Aila who wins our heart as a wife who is remarkably patient and composed in spite of the negligence of her husband towards the family and also towards the nation. She balances her family when Sonny is busy in handling his relationship with 'Blonde' and even fulfills the responsibility towards the nation by silently participating in the revolution. The way Aila handles the depression of her daughter, manages to provide a happy married life, even after being arrested she has a far better hold on the family and takes decision for her children ultimately reveals her as a complete woman. Aila's struggle for the existence of her family in the struggle against the Apartheid ultimately made her to

jump into the struggle and that too stealthily. For this crucial decision Aila suffered in her life and the pain of her suffering makes one connect the powerful character of women all the way from South Africa to India in the feministic world of Mahasweta Devi.

Mahasweta's heart touching creation of the character of 'Jasoda' of 'Breast Giver' compels us to question ourselves : are we actually breathing in a woman empowered world. Jasoda after her husband becomes crippled, becomes a wet-nurse breast-feeding an endless number of the new-borns of rich class. Jasoda, forced by her husband and the circumstances, starts acting as a surrogate mother just to keep the breast milk flowing so that she could keep her family well-fed till the breasts turned into a cancerous part and hence both the milk and income ceases. Jasoda and Aila are quite similar in terms of the dedication in keeping their family going even at the risk of their own life. In terms of Aila we envisage the direct impact of the then political scenario in the life and family of Sonny and Aila, but in case of Jasoda Mahasweta Devi has presented a complex picture of the political issues in a nation free from colonialism yet bounded up in the chains of casteism and ego of upper class and lower class. Superficially, the matter of Jasoda may sound the problem related to the women empowerment but we should not forget that such problems arise due to loopholes in our political structure which fails to construct a sound society where both the sexes are treated equally. Hence, be it South Africa or India the women keep on incessantly suffering numerous challenges like ' Draupadi' in one of the remarkable works of Mahasweta Devi named ' Draupadi'. ' Dopdi' as the name appears in the Bengali dialect is a rebel whom the government forces kept on trying to break

down her courage so that through her they could subjugate the rebel tribal group. Even after the days of rape, abuse deprivation from food and water the government forces failed to break her strength. In fact at the end she stands up and faces her abusers as a woman with immense feministic power sprouting out from her naked and bleeding body.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi both have uncovered each and every layer of the political aspect and measured every depth of the political impact in their works through their memorable characters. One finds that both have most of the times selected the female characters in all those roles which we all females play in this society in our everyday life. Their characters are able to stand boldly against the government policies like Julie Summers and Draupadi; courageous wives like Aila and Jasoda and two remarkable characters who have been really strong mothers suffering due the follies in the political policies and implementations. Claudia Lindgard of Gordimer's *The House Gun* was compelled to rethink about the quality of the upbringing which she had provided to her son Duncun who had committed the crime of murdering his friend Carl Jespersion or else it is better to say was compelled to commit the crime in the state of absent mindedness just because of the liberal rules of the government about her policies of allowing the common man to keep the arms at home. *The House Gun* actually unfolds the grave impact of the decisions which many a times our government takes without thinking from all aspects on it. 'Sujata', the mother of 'Brati' in Mahasweta Devi's novel *Hajar Churasir Ma* depicts a pain somewhat very similar to that of Claudia Lindgard. Sujata, a wife whose existence for husband was limited to her ability of

satisfying her husband sexually, has to give birth to an unwanted child Brati who had ultimately turned out to be the only hope of her life. Unfortunately, he was brutally murdered because of being naxal and then through the sentiments of a mother we actually confront those grave political situations which give birth to naxal movement, and further got pressurized by the unjust political and social issues which are absolutely indifferent towards the sentiments of a mother.

Nadine Gordimer and Mahasweta Devi have given an extra edge to the abilities of literature which believes in only religion, that is, humanity. It is humans who form the social and political structure. Therefore, it becomes the ethical responsibility of the writers to bring a holistic development among the people through their works so that a real utopia could be established.

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Amrita Singh, Research Scholar, BRA Bihar University

Mahasweta Devi : The Voice of the Dispossessed

Dr. Rashmi Kumari

Abstract

Mahasweta Devi was a champion of the cause of the poor and downtrodden. As a typical post-colonial writer she wrote against social and gender discrimination, injustice and inequality. In *Hajar Churashir Ma* she wrote on the Naxalite movement. In her *Breast Stories* and *Behind the Bodice* she wrote about exploitation of the woman's body particularly of the tribals and others belonging to the poor strata. As a woman writer her novels and stories speak of her sensitiveness and tenderness of feeling in delineation of characters. As an advocate of woman's right she is as much a feminist. She stands as an intellectual known for her feminist deconstructionist and subaltern criticism in cultural texts and her writings. In *Draupadi* she has remarkably reinterpreted the story of Draupadi's disrobing in the *Mahabharata*.

Key Words : colonization, subaltern, mythology, bodice, victimization, activist, praxis.

My India still lives behind a curtain of darkness, a curtain that separates the mainstream society from poor and the deprived. But then why my India alone ? As the century comes to an end, it is important that we all make an attempt to tear the curtain of darkness, see the reality that lies beyond and see our own true faces in the process.' (Mahasweta Devi, Ramon Magsaysay award acceptance speech.)

Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) was a fighter all her life, through her books and through her activism and spoke in a register which, resonated with them, and told of the practice of inordinate inequalities and

exclusions which disfigure Indian stand. Her ability to communicate across languages and cultures, the simplest, starkest realities of the lives of India's dispossessed left many in awe. She did receive a strong impetus from postcolonial criticism- her translator Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was an important figure of the movement- but while her stories were locally inflected, her concerns were universal. Interestingly, the realities of everyday rural life which moved her to start writing in the sixties, when she taught at a college in the outskirts of Kolkata, were largely those which moved the youth of the city to join the armed agrarian revolt at Naxalbari, Indeed, the setting of her most famous novel, *Hajar Churashir Ma* (of 1974, filmed by Govind Nihalani in 1998) is the Naxalite movement.

Her writing addressed one single word : "injustice," G.N. Devy, a writer and activist who worked closely with Devi, said. "Wherever she saw what she thought was injustice, she plunged into the struggle and never looked back." Mahasweta's fiction, pitch forked into international limelight by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak through her short stories entitled "Breast Stories" sets different standards of aesthetics-standards which are counter canonical and almost anti-literary. Spivak, in her essays has created a critical discourse around Mahasweta Devi from the postcolonial subaltern perspective. Spivak's critique emerges as a means of both understanding and combating the oppression of such indigenous people to whom she refers as the 'subaltern' and the 'fourth world'. Spivak theorizes the characters of the tribal men and women in Mahasweta's texts as 'subaltern'. Paralleling the postcolonial, post-feminist agenda of decolonizing the tradition, religion, ethics and every other hierarchical institution. Mahasweta inscribes a

new sexual/textual praxis in her narratives of the tribal, dalit woman who undergoes double colonization due to her ethnic/caste/class identity and gender.

Subaltern :

The term 'subaltern' owes its origin to Antonio Gramsci's Writings and underlines a subordinate position in terms of class, caste, race, and culture. It was popularized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay titled, "Can the subaltern speak ?" (1985)

'Subaltern' and 'Feminist' histories, among others constitute some of the dominant historiographical positions that deconstruct the mainstream to decentre it and reinvest the historical space with the voices of the marginals.

Colin Mac Cabe in Foreword to *In Other Worlds* comments on the articulation of gender in Mahasweta's texts :

"The force of Mahasweta Devi's text resides in its grounding in the gendered subaltern's body, in that female body which is never questioned and only exploited. The bodies of Jashoda and Dopdi figure forth the unutterable ugliness and cruelty which cook in Third World kitchen to produce the First World feast that we daily enjoy."

The sensitivity and ironic intensity of Mahasweta's idiom multiples manifold when she documents the tensions and struggles in the lives of the gendered subaltern. Devi does not treat gender, class and race as analogous narratives, she rather takes them as interpenetrative ones. The co-editors of *Women. Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha note :

"Throughout Mahasweta Devi's varied fiction women's subjugation is portrayed as linked to the oppression of caste and class. But in the best of her

writing she quite brilliantly, and with resonance, explores the articulation of class, cast, and gender in the specific situations she depicts."

Breast Stories

In her book, "Breast Stories", Mahasweta Devi, as an Indian intellectual known for her feminist, deconstructionist, and subaltern criticisms in cultural texts, literature and her own radical writings, tells the stories of the women of India who are caught endlessly in the cycles of holiness and self-abnegation. Although it was originally written in Bengali, Breast Stories was translated into English by feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1997. The three stories are titled : *Draupadi*, *Behind the Bodice*, and *Breast Giver*. They have one connecting thread- the breast, a metaphor for the exploitation of women from marginalized communities. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out in her introduction, the breast is far more than a symbol in these stories- it is the means of harshly indicting an exploitative social system.

Draupadi

In 'Draupadi', the protagonist, Dopdi Mejhen, is a tribal revolutionary, who, arrested and gangraped in custody, turns the terrible wounds of her breast into a counter-offensive.

Mahasweta intervenes into the cultural history of the nation by countervailing the mythical givens. Myth as a source and vehicle of hegemonic control, serves to contain and condition the responses of the marginalized 'other'. Mahasweta's history of the subaltern comes forth in the form of a counter dialogue against the oppressively hegemonic *Itihas Puranic* history of India. Her texts demolish the dominant symbol/myths embodied in the cultural-histories texts like

Vedas, Puranas, *Ramayana and Mahabharata*. In "Untapped Resources", she writes "It is essential to revive existing myths and adapt them to the present time and, following the oral tradition, create new ones as well. While I find the existing mythologies, epics and Puranas interesting; I use them with a new interpretation." Dopti, in her story "Draupadi" is a revised and demythicised incarnation of the epical Draupadi who belongs to the Santhal tribe. In her reincarnation, she is placed within contemporary historical contexts where her ancestry is treated to Champabhumi of Bengal and her present status is described to be that of an activist of the naxalite movement of the seventies, in the area of the northern part of West Bengal, a fugitive on the run from the police. Dopdi is a gendered subaltern. As a woman belonging of the lowest of the low economic class, she is subjected to double subalternization. Her subaltern status is further compounded by the grotesque workings of her caste.

Mahasweta, once again, inverts and revises the legacy of cultural nationalism by reinterpreting the story of the most powerful female character of Mahabharata, Draupadi, in her story "Draupadi. Mahasweta reinterprets the story of Draupadi's disrobing, one of the famous episodes of this cultural religious text. Unlike her mythological namesake, Mahasweta Devi's Dopdi gets disrobed in the dark, dreaded, wild world of a forest where no divine male power comes to her rescue. She is in a place and situation where she must act for herself. Force, physical violence, verbal abuse and other forms of aggression have always been used to control women's bodies and gain their obedience. It is always 'the female body' which is both the object of desire and the subject

of control. Dopdi, as she is apprehended, tortured, gangraped, brutalized all through the night, neither expects nor receives salvation from any quarter. She would not wash, nor allow the rapists to clothe her the morning after. By disallowing her torture, rape and nakedness to intimidate her and instead by using these as weapons to insult and browbeat the enemy, Dopdi inverts the whole system of significations the epic is premised upon. The meanings that the Mahabharata episode assigns to sexual assault and nakedness, i.e. shame, loss, fear only serve to consolidate the operating relations of power. Mahasweta's Dopdi ironically reverses the semiotics of these signs to produce a sense of Dopdi ironically reverses the semiotics of these signs to produce a sense of bewilderment, incomprehension and scare among the male-violators.

No miracle can save Dipdi, and she doesn't want it either. As Dopdi is pursued by her abusers, she stands up to them, laughing hysterically as she tears up her sari, exposing her nakedness in a chilling act of defiance akin to what we saw in Imphal in 2004 when women protested the killing of Thangiam Manorama.

"Draupadi's black body comes even closer. Draupadi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation, what's the use of clothes ? You can strip me but how can you clothe me again ? Are you a man ? She looks around and chooses the front to spit a bloody gab at and says, there isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my clothes on me. What more can you do ? Come on, *Kounter* me-Come

on, *Kounter* me ?

Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid,. (Draupadi 33)

Dopdi's action totally dislocates and belittles the disciplined 'resistance' displayed by Draupadi's lamentations as she attempts to awaken the masculine powers of the great patriarchs in the grand epical narrative. In a stunning transformation the powerless tribal woman challenges the entire power of a ruthless postcolonial state embodied in figure of Senanayak. draupadi confronts Senanayak, denigrates is false masculinist pride and challenges him to 'Kounter' her. Draupadi looks like a victim but acts like an agent. Indeed, the binary of victim and agent falls apart as Draupadi effectively separates violation from victimhood. As she stands insistently naked before her violators, Dopdi manages to wield her wounded body as a weapon to terrify them. By refusing the disciplining power of shame scripted into the act of rape, Draupadi becomes, in the words of Mahasweta Devi's translator Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a "terrifying super object." (Spivak (1988, 184)

Breast Giver

In her story, "The Breast Giver," from her collection of short stories called, "Breast Stories," Mahasweta Devi outlines women's identity as body, worker and object. In a tale of a Bengali wet-nurse, Devi shows female protagonist, Jashoda, living in a 1960's India as she is compelled to take up 'professional motherhood' when her Brahman husband loses both his feet.

Breast-Giver dramatizes the exploitation and

gruesome death of Jashoda, a subaltern woman character in Devi's historical fiction, who is employed as a professional mother, She became a wet nurse in the upper-class household of the Haldar family in part of land where everything was dependent to male. Morton, Stephen explains Spivak's careful observation of Devi's descriptions about "Jashoda's cancerous body in the closing sequence of the story, especially the phrase, the sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes". It is the stage of forbearance and the power of motherhood in professional context. Morton, Stephen argues it as, "what is more, Jashoda's revolting and cancerous maternal body offers a powerful and situated counterpoint to the universal valorisation of women's embodied resistance and political struggle" (26). It could be calculated as the performative mode of female existence in her own context that no male and social phenomena could defy. Jashoda becomes more and more revered for her body's otherworldly tolerance, as the story that plays out on Jashoda's body. Jashoda suffers a painful and sickened death. Her plentiful breasts now become a gaping wound. She did not get the food and survival sources from Haldar's house as they parted here and there. Neither her husband followed her. She remained alone and she searched to pass out the life. She got cancer in her breast. Kanganalicharan, her husband only came to support her. But, it was already late that they could not do anything. She is destined to die with breast cancer. It is the extreme phase of female resistance without defying male dominance. She showed it to her husband who came after her disease. Mahsweta justifies the Jashoda's existential struggle with such a condition where. "Ishel showed him her bare left breast, thick with running sores and said, 'See these sores ? Do

you know how these sores smell ? What will you do with me now ? Why did you came to take me ?". It is the biggest question over the patriarchal system, and vain existence of master and male characters. She became mother to all, and left them all helpless to help her. Breast experience for female is the experience of her own existence. Young, Marion Iris agrees to the centre of a person's being. I may locate my consciousness in my head, but myself, my existence as a solid person in the world, starts from my chest, from which I feel myself rise and radiate". Jashoda did not lack being female. She remained able to challenge the social structure that it could not defy her as she became a spiritual figure, 'Mother'.

"Such is the power of the Indian soil that all women turn into mothers here and all men remain immersed in the spirit of holy childhood," writes Devi. This theme of oppressive hegemony, built into both spiritual practice and economic belief, resonates in all of the narratives of the women in, *Breast Stories*.

Behind the Bodice

"Behind the Bodice" is the last of the stories that does not carry a sense of seriousness as do the first two. The theme of the story is based on the song of a Bollywood movie, *Khalnayak*. The story opens with a thought-provoking statement of the writer herself : 'Wat is there' was the national problem that year. When it became a national issue, the other fuck-ups of that time e.g. crop failure-earthquake, everywhere clashes between so-called terrorists and state power and therefore killings, the beheading of a young man and woman in Haryana for the crime of marrying out of caste, the unreasonable demands of Medha Patkar and others around the Narmada dam, hundreds of rape-

murder-lockup torture etc. non-issues which by natural law approached but failed to reach highlighting in the newspapers all this remained non-issues. Much more important than this was 'choli ke piche' behind the bodice.

The quote above brings out the irony of the Indian media that could never realize the importance and solemnity of the real issues of concern. The useless things always make the big news in India. Mahasweta also turns her attention to the so-called scholars communicating in the non Indian languages on the national-level daises and become the decision makers.

At the centre of "Behind the Bodice", are Gangor-a migrant labourer, and Upin-a well-to-do photographer, who Gangor's breasts an object of his photography. Mahasweta talks of a woman who is :

A high-breasted rural woman [that] sits slack with breast shoved into an infant's mouth. The breast is covered with the end of her cloth. The same girl is walking with many girls carrying water on her head. Breasts overflowing like full pitchers.

The story spins around Upin's senseless obsession with Gangor's breasts. He compares them with his wife Shital's silicone implants, which are unnatural and devoid of any interest to him. Despite himself, he unravels a series of events which lead to Gangor's downfall, and eventually his own. *Behind the Bodice* was adapted into a movie by director Italo Spineli, starring Priyanka Bose and Adil Hussain.

In "Behind the Bodice," Mahasweta Devi conceptualizes the mangled breasts of Gangor as a metaphor of the violence, especially custodial, that has become an everyday occurrence in our democratic India. In his essay "Critique of violence," Walter

Benjamin highlights the law-preserving violence that is conservative, protective and 'threatening', designed to preserve or reinforce a pre-existing of the police exposes the measures that ensure domination of the other in the phallogocentric society. The raw and bitten breasts of Gangor signify that it is criminal to ask the question about the breasts that lie behind the piece of cloth, for these breasts provide an image of the harsh reality about the lives of the subaltern. The rape of the aboriginal Gangor by the police signifies the rape, torture, humiliation, manipulation and exploitation carried out by the institutions and protectors of law. Yet her victimization remains a "non-issue" in a postcolonial nation where the government has denotified the subaltern, failed to provide them the right to be heard, to settle somewhere permanently, and to be protected under the law.

Conclusion

The re-presentation of Dopdi, Jashoda and Gangor proves two undeniable facts : the subaltern woman can be represented in imaginative writing and she can be represented as an "agent". In this sense Mahasweta Devi's short story effectively dismantles Spivak's contention in her essay "Can the Subaltern speak ?" that "subaltern as female cannot be heard or read". In all three stories we have subaltern women who speak, speak loudly- literally and metaphorically, for, their 'voice... is as terrifying sky splitting and sharp as her ululation' (like Dopdi's) make themselves heard.

Throughout her life and her writing, Mahasweta Devi tried to ensure that the plight of "suffering spectators" of a fast developing country didn't unnoticed. She was drawn to people who led a "subhuman existence", people with no access to education or health care or roads or income. Many of

them may not be able to read her work yet, but it's because of her that their stories are out there.

For Mahasweta Devi, it was imperative to "make an attempt to tear the curtain of darkness, see the reality that lies beyond and see our own true faces in the process". With her writing and activism, Mahasweta Devi holds up a mirror to society.

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Dr. Rashmi Kumari, Associate Professor, L.N. College, Bhagwanpur, Vaishali, BRA Bihar University, Muzaffarpur.

A Subaltern Critique on Mahasweta Devi's Novels

Sumit Talukdar

When history deals with the down trodden people, it speaks volumes of the backward classes and the tribal section of the society, it means something else. Such kind of history is quite different from the conventional, text book-oriented history discussing exclusively kings, emperors and their credits-discredits, bloody wars and battles, intrigues and conspiracies and so on. This new subaltern history opens a new vista of historical events and facts with unique thoughts and opinions on the lives and livelihoods of the marginalised, neglected people of the society. In many novels and stories Mahasweta Devi uses history as a background of 'the effect of the real' as Roland Barthes has pointed out in *The Rustle of Language* and gives a subaltern shape to it.

Indeed fiction of this subaltern kind relies for its effect on its 'effect of the real'. The plausibility of Jashoda (Stana dayini), Draupadi (Agnigarbha), Birsa Munda (Aranyer Adhikar) is that they could have existed as subalterns in a specific historical moment imagined and tested by orthodox assumptions. When the subalternist historian imagines a historical moment within which shadowy named characters backed up by some counter-insurgent or dominant-gender textual material have their plausible being, in order that a historical narrative can coherently take shape, the assumptions are not very different. According to Prof. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern : Mahasweta Devi's 'Stanadayini' : "Those who read or write literature can claim as little of subaltern status as those who read or write history. The difference is that

the subaltern as object is supposed to be imagined in one case and real in another." (Subaltern Studies-V, OUP, edited by Ranajit Guha, P-95).

In the story 'Stanadayini' (Breast Giver) we can see the milk that is produced in one's own body for one's own children is a use-value. When there is a superfluity of use-values, exchange-values arise. That which cannot be used is exchanged under 'surplus labour.' As soon as the exchange-value of Jashoda's milk emerges, it is appropriate at once by the other children of the Halder family. Therefore good food and constant sexual servicing are provided so that she can be kept in prime condition of optimum lactation. Mahasweta Devi narrates Jashoda's condition in this way- "She thought of her breasts as most precious object. At night when Kangalicharan (her husband) started to give her a feel she said 'Look, I'm going to pull our weight with these. Take good care how you use them ?' Jashoda had forever scrubbed her breasts carefully with soap and oil, for the master's sons had put the nipples in their mouth. Why did these breasts betray her in the end ?.... Knowing these breasts to be the rice-winner she had constantly conceived to keep them filled with milk."

Mahasweta Devi knows how to write history out of history. Therefore her first novel *Janshir Rani* (Queen of Janshi) published in 1956 based on Queen Lakshmibai of Janshi and her indomitable fight against the British in the time of Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 is not mere a narrative of same historical events but a true chronicle of strong feminism. In 'Nati' (The courtesan) published in 1957 Mahasweta not only shows a historical romance of Moti and Khudabox in Gwalior state but also how a mass-movement among the farmers was organised against the British. Being inhumanly brutally tortured the farmers leaving their

ploughs seized the weapons in hand. In 'Andhar Manik' (The Jewel of Darkness) she portrays the invasion of the Bargi and their merciless oppression and plundering in 18th century Bengal. In 'Kobi Bandya Ghatin Jiban O Mrityu' (Life And Death of Poet Bandya Bhati) published in 1966 she actually wants to portray the life and death of a tribal poet Bandya Ghati in the background of 16th century history of Midnapore in Bengal. Therefore, while deconstructing Mahasweta Devi's narratives and texts we can see how a common history takes shape of another history either contemporary or subaltern.

Sometimes politics plays a significant role in regional history where the tribals, the Adivasi Samaj are always fighting for their rights, their honour and their struggle for existence. In history the Munda tribe is always neglected and untold. But in *Aranyer Adhikar* (Right of the Forest) Mahasweta Devi keeps alive Brisa Munda as a political and historical hero and his armed encounter along with his glorious death as a memorable historical saga. Here it is worth mentioning that Mahasweta was indebted to Suresh Singh's thesis-work 'Dust Storm and Hanging Mist' from Patna University. However her 'Sidhu Kanu Dake' (At the call of Sidhu Kanu) in 1981 based on Santhal revolt is also a historical novel replete with a number of subaltern elements. Apart from these novels 'Titumir' and 'Chotti Munda Ebang Taar Teer' (Chotti Munda And His Arrow) are also based on tribal revolt and revolution. Finally Mahasweta Devi wrote a strong political-historical novel named 'Operation : Basai Tudu'. Here the main protagonist Basai comes of Tudu tribe and an active follower of C.P.M. But later he joins Naxalite movement being extremely disillusioned. His political life takes a new turn.

No doubt all these characters from Birsa Munda

to Basai Tudu coming from mostly tribal as well as backward community play a significant role in our society with their social commitment and elemental demands. Their stories are not merely documentation of history but something else related to society's changing orders and values. A real history is always searching and modifying itself. It should not be limited only to conventional texts and theories. Therefore, Prof. Ranajit Guha observes- "Historical scholarship has developed through recursive practice, a tradition that tends to ignore the small drama and fine detail of social existence, especially at its lower depths. A critical historiography can make up for this lacuna by bending closer to the ground in order to pick up the traces of a subaltern life in its passage through time' (Subaltern Studies-V, OUP. P-138).

Mahasweta Devi always writes for the dalits, tribals and backward classes. Sometimes she joins their movement and spins a real story out of their struggle for human right. No writer spares so much ink and page on the subaltern groups as Mahasweta does in her novels. She wants to bring to light this neglected and untold part of history and prepares a way for subaltern studies.

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Mr. Sumit Talukdar, 58, Shyam Road, P.O.- Naihati, Dist.- North 24 Parganas, West Bengal- 743165

Maheswata Devi's Our Non-Veg Cow and Other Stories: A Postcolonial Approach

Dr. Gagan Bihari Purohit

Abstract

Maheswata Devi is popularly known for her amazing versatility as a conscience keeper of the poor and down trodden. Two parallel worlds of explorations- one dealing with the fun and fantasy of the children's world and the other, much serious and complex, adult world where the violence and bloodshed, anarchy and hierarchical hegemony by a selected few is heeded- are attempted by Devi simultaneously to show case her creative process involving both the adult and children's worldview. She has the salt of earth in her armour to exploit the postcolonial tradition of indigenous representation to pay the colonial hegemony back with its own pie. Like the African and West Indian or even the Australian writers who have tried to unearth their own past glory and cultural tradition for self representation and self identification, Devi also tries her hand in digging her indigenous material and subject matter to give a fitting reply to colonial hegemony.

Key words: fantasy, postcolonial, Children's Literature, colonial hegemony, indigenous trope

The present volume of stories takes us to a nostalgic sojourn where Devi's family, crowded with male and female characters, including her brothers and sisters form part of the formidable ally of the creative oeuvre she ventures forth. The familial bond serves as the connecting link in keeping with the close-knit structure of the text. Her childhood reveries filled with fun and pleasure hold the centre stage. Fantasy and realism interplay in a symbiotic way to give a magic realism touch to her stories that is so

perfectly blended in Marquez and Rushdie. What becomes the cynosure of all eyes is Devi's avid interest in the world of children which she explores with meticulous accuracy and immaculate precision. She has the uncanny knack of depicting the child psychology which relegates the adult figures into mere insignificance. That some of these adults have marginal presence in the text under discussion is enough indication of things to come.

The opening story "Those Boys" opens up new avenues for the inquisitive reader with the vastly panoramic and complex family framework where Devi is held accountable for every odd thing, being the eldest child in the family of nine children. The nonchalant manner in which Devi begins the story reminds us of one or two things that are going on in the mind of the writer to rivet to "the days of maximum fun and happiness"(i). Every poignant strand of her family life has been laid bare, not to mention the apathetic stand of her parents and the frequent occurrence of family feuds that have become the talk of the time, be it a marriage function, thread ceremony or some other family ritual. She is reminded of her father's inquisitive question, what is essential for a man's life? And the worrying issue that perturbs Devi time and again, "is there anything else one needs for a sacred ceremony?",(2) has become the bone of contention of every family in India even at present times. It is quite easy to pick up a quarrel at the slightest pretext over family discontentment or in social gatherings. The truants played by her brothers are also not spared by the watchful eyes of Devi. Her younger brother Tantu's truants reminds the sensitive writer of the commonsense dictates that life should be a mixture of what should be required of leading a decent life, looking after the basic needs. But that is not the whole thing; Tantu's creative stuff at making a homemade

telescope with empty talcum powder tin and cut out pictures in a banal manner—his home movie show—also gives the Devi's word of accolades for her brothers. That is, the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of the family life shows that the writer treats everything that she encounters on a routine basis in an objective manner. Even a silly event of awe inspiring ease with which the child crushes the mosquitoes between his fingers resulting in "ethereal delight" (4) catches the attention of the reader. On the whole the story serves as an introduction to the innocent but not trouble free childhood and above all the notoriety of her brother Phalgu, who with his endless adventures and mischief provides Devi with enough stuff to enrich her creative oeuvre. Of course, irony becomes her forte in dealing with the stories concerned with her family. She offers a candid view of how Phalgu serves as a medium of her creative expression: "I could go on talking about Phalgu, and run out of tales. All the best stories in the world have beginnings, but no endings"(3). Perhaps Devi's suggestion is for the open ended stories that provide a reader with numerous choices and interpretations. A postmodernist trait indeed !

The second story, "Nyadosh, the Incredible cow", reveals Devi's unbridled enthusiasm to go ahead with the children's agenda of reality presented in a fantastic way, much in the tradition of the magic realists like Rushdie who in his controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) takes recourse to describing the pleasant falling of Gabriel Farista and Salladin Chamcha from heaven without a parachute. By the same token, Devi also takes the most faithful and sacred domestic animal of Hindu mythology, the cow to task; she achieves what appears as incredible but in hindsight she is well aware that a lot of social anomalies are still there to rid the society of such age old dispensation. Trouble crops up when the cow becomes a menace for children of the

family by eating their school books. One cannot but experience the humorous and ironic accounts of the cow eating books voraciously: “This is the quickest way to study, Look! With what determination she’s eating up the books!” (11) is what her father reveals. Devi here seems to point out two pitfalls usually associated with children; they do not take care of their books, and by swallowing books the cow shows the way to them as to how to get access to knowledge from books. Ironically, she challenges the traditional method of knowledge accumulation of by hearting.

The cow Nyadosh is fond of non vegetarian food and her frail physical frame became very strong in complicity with the food; all the attempts to check her strength by putting her in a well protected cow shed would fail as she would jump into the open from the gap of cowshed, just above her waist. However, the most striking aspect of her character is the bitter acrimony with the British Raj: “Fighting the British police was not a joke! Nyadosh is possibly the only cow in British ruled India to have police cases lodged against her” (11). The rebellion that Devi wants to carry out against the British hegemony is being well propagated by her mouthpiece. And the story of her reformation in being a domesticated animal also assumes greater significance in the context of the story. In the insightful eyes of Aneesh and Abu, “Nyadosh is like a scientist, Ma, she wants to get to the root of everything. She doesn’t like the hay in her shed, she wants to get to its source” (13). The cow becomes a visionary of sorts who is known for her individuality; she has never given in to rebellion of any sort, rather she fought against all odds like a true patriot that is a prominent theme with Indians during the British Raj. Satya P. Mohanty also advocates the concept of “alternative modernities” for self representation of writers from erstwhile colonies. The story has enough stuff to be considered

as postcolonial in its content which prefers sheer self identification and indigenous representation.

The next story down the line, “Not a Cock and Bull Story” tells the family story of integrity and sagacity where each member of the family serves as a vital cog in the family wheel. Take for instance, the episode when her mother is on a South Indian tour for a holy pilgrimage, her Baba’s “sad smile”(20) at her departure and the follow up action merits our empathy: “when your mother’s not here, the Laxmi of the house is missing. And if the Laxmi is gone, then there’s no question of going to the market every day. That’s why I’ve brought four hundred cauliflowers and twenty two maunds of rice“(20). All this arrangement has been made for only two members in the family. Here one thing becomes very clear. The feeling of a husband for a wife would go a long way to solve the problem of women empowerment, very much a modern and contemporary theme. The fact that wife is being treated as the home minister, or more significantly, “the Laxmi of the house”, will be a shot in hand of the feminists who would always complain maltreatment at the hands of their respective husbands.

“Phalgu’s Story” is a true cast of her brother in many moulds, his emotional attachment for pet animals, his mischiefs and truants, and her unfailing faith in his tales – all these strands have been taken together to form unity and structure for the story in question. She also attacks superstition through common refrain. She puts it in a convincing way, “...the belief that cocks crow at dawn is just false publicity; they crow whenever they please”(23). Against the backdrop of children being innocent; R.M.Ballantyn’s *The Coral Island* (1858) obviously comes to our mind, Devi like William Golding’s watershed novel *Lord of Flies* (1954) where children are no more seen as innocent but adult incarnation of inherent evil, also

sees negative aspects of children come to limelight even when these characters happen to be her own kith and kin. All her four brothers- Aneesh, Abu, Phalgu and Tantu- are known for their notoriety. What merits appreciation is Devi's Maa's innocence versus her sons' heavy clamp down on her psychology. Obfuscation of facts often becomes their bane:"What my brothers and sisters did—like swimming in the river, stealing fruits from other people's trees, or fishing in the local pond during the monsoons—were things everybody did" (30). Descriptions like "he (Phalgu) never outgrew his impish habits" (33) and "Mischievous came naturally to Phalgu" (33) clearly show that there can be no defense for being dishonest.

"Phalgu and the Cheetah- Man" again takes the readers into the realm of fantasy which has replication of RK. Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) when the man-eater tiger has reformed into a humane personality. It makes an attempt to tell "the reverse of the real story"(44). The tiger has written off the account of Jim Corbett and wants to represent himself before Phalgu so that he can truly represent himself. A typical postcolonial story indeed; the tiger's version is really auguring well for our purpose: "I need to let the truth be known. Poor Corbett wrote what he thought was true. I don't mind that, for he misunderstood the whole thing all along. Well, he has written about what he did, but I also have something to say. That's why I've come to you" (43). Corbett's view of stalking the Cheetah of Rudraprayag is really confusing for the tiger made him famous. When it killed some corrupt elements in the society it invited the administration's galling and he is "determined to die" (45) as a mark of protest against sheer injustice. In the process of dying it wanted to do a favour to Corbett by willingly surrendering before him. The story has lent credence to the postcolonial thrust of representing the marginal

and indigenous mode of representation and coming through the dreams of Phalgu the incredible story of man like Cheetah represents the true account of representation much like what Chinua Achebe has foreseen for Africa. C.L.Innes in *The Cambridge Introduction of Postcolonial Literature in English* argues in favour of indigenous idiom and culture for expression drawing upon an Achebe interview to K.A.Appiah:

I'm an Ibo writer because this is my basic culture; Nigerian, African and a writer...no, black first, then a writer. Each of these identities does call for a certain kind of commitment on my part. I must see what it is to be black—and this means being sufficiently intelligent to know how the world is moving, and how the black people fair in this world. This is what means to be black. Or an African—what does Africa mean to the world? When you see an African what does it mean to a white man? (208).

The story "Seven Ghosts" takes us on a ride to different world altogether when we meet gitgitas, pichpichas, and *kirkichas*—the colloquial version of ghost type and the man who is master of the witchcraft, having all-round knowledge about the ghosts is even more interesting too. Phalgu's initiation into the ghost world through, Awadhilal, who promises all types of security to him is significant here considering the child's feeling of fear about ghosts. The entire story is based on the superstitious belief relating to the origin (poor souls being condemned to lead a life of ghosts) and the effective means to control them. The riveting account of the Bilbilas, "dwarf ghosts"(64) affects directly to children like Phalgu who is at the receiving end from other three famed categories of ghosts who beat later up mercilessly. Devi is quite adept at depicting the superstitious psychology of the village folk who fall prey to hearsay at the drop of a hat. A

prevalent superstitious practice that ghosts still exist in some part of India and the methodical approach to ward off the fear of ghosts is significant: "Awadh Lal took some herbs and roots from his bag. He made a hole in the wall of that room and inserted the stuff. It was supposedly a proven antidote for ghosts." (55). Devi's scathing attack on the irresponsible village women who indulge in quarrel for a silly thing is best exhibited in the story. Through Awadh Lal she portrays the true account of the quarrelsome village women: "...there's no peace in the village without *kirkicha* ghosts. Women are always quarreling. It's the *kirkicha* ghosts who hurl double the abuse at the bickering women and keep the situation under control". (57). The account that follows is even more heart rendering. These quarreling women do not get salvation even at the most holiest rites being performed at "Gayaji". Devi does not spare a chance to represent contemporary reality through the incredible world of ghjosts

"Khudey The Dacoit" is not the real dacoit but the makeshift one who steals valuables from the rich and distributes among the poor who are ravished by the "infamous famine of 1943" (67). The rich farmers and money lenders exploit the poor during the time of famine and Devi is critical of the lavish attitude of these classes to exploit the poor and down trodden. The dacoit is the pride of the poor and envy of the rich who looted food and property from the rich in order to distribute among the poor. The climax of the story comes when Dukhey, a shepherd friend of the dacoit arranges food for four accused convicts with the support from the village women which gains a good ground against the backdrop of the naxlite movement of which Devi is an ardent advocate.

"Sivaji's Horse" is postcolonial in content as the anti-colonial nuances are clearly depicted; Incessant Bagchi's loquacious account of riding Sivaji's horse is

fantasy at its best. Two things that draw the reader's attention in the story is the British side of the story and "esemplastic" power of imagination. The postcolonial sentiment is reminding the reader of the challenging prospects at hand; how history has been distorted to suit the British version or the way these white men manipulate history to keep the outraging elements under control is very annoying: The Britishers are all anti-Indian. That's why they've carefully kept these facts out of history"(76). As for power of imagination, Bagchi argues in a persuasive way that seeing is believing is not always true and sometimes one has to give credit to believing also: "Nothing good happens to you because you don't know how to believe"(76) the story of Chatrpati being a lord of umbrellas who became rich by dealing in umbrellas also adds humour to the otherwise somber mood.

The story "All-alone" is more a type than an individual where Tilak's lonely plight is being exploited by Devi. He is "an impish-looking boy" (87) without any elite etiquette which does not spring any surprise to the mature reader because it refers more to the child's reverie than reality of any sort. The typical justification he gives for his name is even more interesting: "it's because I am called All- alone that I visit people who are all alone"(90). The story is all about the childhood enjoyment versus the adult interruption. When Tilak's sound sleep is disturbed by the alarm well's incessant ringing and the loud yelling of adults he is not ready to accept the reality. He argues with an imploring tone: "Adults are quite disgusting" (97-98).

The story that ends the volume, "Chitu" is an engrossing account a twelve year old boy who seemingly possesses magic power and any lay man can have access to this "ghost-child" (104). The ambiguity between science and superstition is the talking point of the story. The fact that a ghost cannot be a true

friend won our hearts ably supported by the world of witch craft and necromancy. Sometimes science has an edge but superstition also gains upper hand at crucial moments compelling human beings to be taken away by the sway of the later. The essence of the collection comes with an apt observation from the ever elegant Devi who argues with her characters convincingly: “The path that stretched was familiar, and so was one that left behind” (112).

The collection has also given us access to the Reader-Response criticism where the reader’s point of view is being emphasized. The narratorial intervention and the unreliability of his account of the story have called on the sensible readers to have their own interpretation. In course of an abiding and seemingly faithful description, Devi does not hesitate to point out this unreliability through the character of Phalgu: “All sorts of incredible things were always happening to him, and we would be told about all about them. There’s no way now to find out if all those incidents were true” (52). The interplay of fantasy and reality becomes a potent device for Devi through which she is able to depict the immediate reality in a detached way. She may not be aware of these critical responses but the universal appeal of her writing has provided us with an opportunity to interpret these stories to cater to our needs.

How can Devi not be aware of colonial hegemony of her childhood days? At a time when India needed peace and calm of business and mind, brewing discontent and unease was the biggest hurdle the writers and intellectual thinkers of the colonial period had to cope with. They were doing great disservice to the free and liberal spirit of postcolonial type. Yet one cannot ignore the threat of bigotry and colonial rule sweeping across Asia and Africa. Children’s Literature may or may not produce the desired results but the

appreciation and potential appeal it has, there is no denying the fact that it has all the elements of living up boldly to the adult imagination. Devi is not caught in the whirlpool of light stuff indulging in the world of children but tries to stick to her awareness agenda promised for the poor and downtrodden. Cheap stuff could have made some sense in the early years but not when the country is striving to get an indigenous identity in the face of stiff competition from globalization. Devi’s world is peopled with dangerous concoction of fantasy coupled with farcical dose of commonsensical happenings in our day to lives. With very little to show by resorting to adult violence and selfish behavior, which is in fact her driving area, Devi is reviving the lost glory of childhood days to take a way off from the problems one has to encounter with on a routine scale. If the adult world does not provide any respite to the common life, one can take time off in focusing on the childhood adventure. Her long battle to ward off fear from the minds of poor and downtrodden has once again proved that she is committed to the cause of marginalized that they are destined to scale new heights, and has earned her stripes for fighting for their struggle and existence. And the attempt here is an add- on to Devi’s versatility coming from her immortal oeuvre.

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Of Margins and Ethics: The Ecocritical Imagination

Dr. Rohit Phutela

Literary Theory with its nuanced interrogation of epistemologies and cultural productions, like literature, has suffused the intellectual air with new multiple and de-linear corollaries initiating new ‘meta-narratives’. While the liberal humanism chose naiveté in contestation of the new discursive contours of the capitalism and globalization, literary theory took the illumination of the totalizing realities, the ‘grand narratives’ and anti-logocentricism head on. The new mythologies of the economic and the socio-cultural required to be politicized and literary theory’s disruptive traits accordingly called into crisis what was earlier taken as essentialist. And of course, the mythologies of enlightenment, meta-narratives, aporia, ideology, etc., politicizing the notions of any uniformity of post-war experiences and stabilization of the civilized center are the pivots of discourse at this moment i.e. the neo-colonial and neo-capitalist. Interrogating the inherent credulity of the historical narratives and showing a curiosity for the micro-narratives, the contingent appropriations of the socio-political and the cultural world experiences is what literary theory has ushered in the complacent waters of literary criticism. Literary theory, by dint of same fact, gets entwined with the ethico-political agendas of literature as its multiple reading communities and their discursive associates and elements make appropriate and valid recipients conveniently open to perspectivization and changes therein further. And the ethical angle of literary performance is conspicuous in Swearingen’s observation where he avers that literature as a “rhetorical” transaction involving “author, text and reader” is essentially an ethical project that presupposes a

community of readers (Web). The contemporary literary theory, as a resolute adversary to make the unheard thin phenomena more vocal and explanatory, is hence bent upon taking a rational dip into the subterranean networks of words and sieve meanings and, as said earlier, facilitating newer productions and, consequently, codifications re-potentiating the literature with political oomph drying up in the complacent lap of liberal humanism. Already, the omnipresent dogmatic beckonings of the “linguistic-relational abilities of humankind” by the global capitalist regimes bring forth the “common places” of language, the generic logical-linguistic forms which establish the pattern for all forms of discourse” (35-36).

Literary theories like Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Post-colonialism, Marxism, Psycho-analysis, etc. have, with a political will, fairly saturated the literary theory with a machismo, able to elevate the language and in the process its bio-political offspring literature, from Aristotelian ‘common places’ (topoi koinoi) and facilitating a reach out to its ‘special places’ (topoi idioi). Hence, the earlier unassuming literary verdicts of the liberal humanism stand effeminate when the currents of neoliberal, neocolonial global orders are redesigning the matrix of the capitalist world order. For say, the excesses of the colonial regimes in the host states getting attributed to the theological givens of human indifference and brutality in the postwar(s) world would hardly find any informed smart takers and sound politically and culturally naive. The trans-historical impact upon the social, cultural, political and economic cartographies of the colonial regimes is conspicuous in the multicultural, multireligious, neocolonial and floundering mixed economy characterizing posture of the historic(al) colonies. The linguistic and the cultural potpourri supplement the essence eroding experimentations of the

colonial apparatus. The dialectics of colonial and neo-colonial and its resultant polyphonic discourse which has become the tag of new world order are contested with post-humanistic logic of the qualifier Post-colonialism. It is this defining moment of the literary theory which has facilitated the situating of new semiotics of culture and society giving birth to the polarization of the literary and the political in the form of margin and centre binaries.

Literature is one of the prime sites of discursive contestation procuring a metaphysical inquiry for the contemporary analytical highbrow class like that of the academia played out in the forums such as this. Postcolonial literature becomes the ambassador of the centre/margin dialectics owing to the historical weight scarred by the political mis/adventures of the stakeholders having to play a complicated role in the discourse of the nation state. Those in the power bloc, economic and political, assumed the historicist role of redefining epistemologies of the subjects, pushing the social and the cultural against the wall, the brink of erasure and extent of closure (of the identity). The postcolonial literature has been fed on this very transnational identity negotiation engaging the 'margins' and 'marginalities' whereby the margins strive to get hold of the center by the political strategies of claiming uniqueness of discourse, resolving to shut off the homogenization of individuality induced by the colony. The convenient praxis for the theorization, as devised by the so called 'hegemonized', has been that of 'writing back', paying back in the same coin rather than a much more preferable 'coinage', local or indigenous sanitized from the external infectivity. Using the same language and forms as that of the eraser, the erased has been seeking a new window of opportunity to the new global order (which is rather a feeble attempt without assuring a capitalist or economic

might) of which it wishes to be a prime player. In this brave (and outrageous) attempt to earn the brand equity, the entire production and cognitive mechanism (educational, industrial and mercantile) and even the socializing paraphernalia like language is modeled on the ideal one, the colonial. So much so that, even the contestations and deliberations on the so called 'attempts-of-liberating mimicry' is carried on in the derided medium. But, since compliance to the modern day dialectical currents is as much a necessity as a compulsion, the guilt is ought to be buried to move ahead for a socio-cultural restrain and a diplomatic one at the same time.

Talking about the margins and marginalization (literary strictly), literary theory, as stated earlier sought to release the literary critical faculty from the universalization maneuvering of the liberal humanism but in turn instituted literature as a representational domain in which each aspect of human portrayal could be interpreted into something else, a dialectical other – structures, genealogy, class demonstration, sexuality, etc. Amidst this severity of literary approach, there emerges ecocriticism which strives to simplify the studies in literature by not endorsing any avant-garde strategies of reading but an unpretentious one which sees into the objectivity of things, key among these being ecology and environment. And the rationale behind bracketing ecocriticism with the margins and globalization discourse today is the unethical dispensation of justice towards the third world countries ('the wretched of the earth') blamed by the Western civilization to be the inviters of environmental degradation and studying the nature not from an anesthetist posture but as a living entity and order. Ecocriticism, therefore, is the political ruse of the marginalized critical doctrines as well as the litterateurs insurgent (writing primarily about nature

or otherwise) committed to the pastoral poetics for artistic satiation which also may be the incognito approach of exposing the capitalist regime's bid to maul the nature and the third world, fashioning the so called ethical imagination against an unethical political execution and an impending catastrophe. The space of the natural is, hence, acquired by the literary and in the current paper I seek to bring forth the same hidden dialectics of ecocriticism via pastoral poetry. The ecocriticism offers a different critical landscape elevated to lofty heights by the yesteryear canonical literary critics beginning from William Wordsworth. Ecocriticism invaded the intellectual realm lately with the declaration of turning the criticism inside out riding high on its 'inverted myth' of representing the nature in literary works just as nature rather than 'abstractions-characterizing' metaphorical or metonymic subtexts or as the unassuming would assume, figurativeness and titivation. Ecocriticism has thus bought an ontological transparency to the reading praxis of the neocolonial cerebral order for those alleging a permeation of the 'ruthless' science into literature hurting the aesthetic essentialism annexed with the artistic decree. The critics practicing the theory may sometimes make methodical assertions of the endangered planet (in the literary work per se) under the compulsive factors of pollution and global heat but at the end of the day it is the literary circumference of the sophistication and cultural sphere which dons the mantle of critical inquisition. Ecocriticism, thus, shatters the collectivizing myths attached to literature which point at a dissonance between the economic/cultural and political in these times "where we have to decipher the logic of this disjunction so that the way is paved for critique to proceed by suturing the cultural and the economic back to the political" (Sharma 86). The (eco)criticism grants a political will

to the critic to critique the literary work wresting the work out of the scientific/environmental cubicles making it a general idea to be mooted at the discursive platforms which literature suffusingly has provisions for. For starters, here is a very unpretentious interpretation of the environmental/literary dialectics discoursed by Peter Barry when he proposes the following vocation of the ecocritics:

“1. The re-read major literary works from an ecocentric perspective, with particular attention to the representation of the natural world.

2. They extend the applicability of a range of ecocentric concepts, using them of things other than the natural world – concepts such as growth and energy, balance and imbalance, symbiosis and mutuality, and sustainable or unsustainable uses of energy and resources.

3. They give special canonical emphasis to writers who foreground nature as a major part of their subject matter [...] They extend the range of literary-critical practice by placing a new emphasis on relevant 'factual' writing, especially reflective topographical material such as essays, travel writing, memoirs and regional literature.

.....

5. They turn away from the 'social constructivism' and 'linguistic determinism' of dominant literary theories (with their emphasis on the linguistic and social constructedness of the external world) and instead emphasize ecocentric values of meticulous observation, collective ethical responsibility, and the claims of the world beyond ourselves.” (254-55)

Barry here navigates the theory of zealots into

the newer seas of investigative politics which is a considerable press forward over the previously established notions of the ecology based theory as scientific and geographical in its naked essence. Here, in this paper, I attempt to critique contemporary Indian poet D. C. Chambial's poetry within the ecocentric paradigms borrowing heavily from the literary theorizations as well as physical sciences postulating the dynamics of energy (entropy and symbiosis), space, matter so endemic to the scientific temper and seen as a resolute foil to the literary sensibilities, a fact universally stamped.

D. C. Chambial has been delving into the muse-pool, for more than 4 decades until now, residing in Himachal Pradesh, the land of scenic beauty comprising picturesque mountains and enchanting greenery. Speaking from such a cultural and epistemological location facilitates Chambial's entering into the sites of acculturation and natural connections naturally streamlining his ecological sensibilities (or so, we as eco-critics strive to perceive). He writes about mountains, rivers, dales, rills, hills, meadows, etc., metaphorising (so typical of poetry) the entire experience as well as generating his own meta-narrative which subsumes the mini-narratives of language decoration at the core of any lyrical execution acting upon the directives of genealogical literary agencies like academic education and creative writing forums. His poetry has nature portrayed in many discursive designs portraying the aesthetic aspect of natural world and ecocriticism equips the same natural world with concrete resonances wresting it from the abstractions making it irreducible from the same.

Hence, the myths of the literary limited only to 'expression with impression' gets interrupted as the impressionist agenda of language is replaced by a more

powerful grand-narrative of conservation and presentation of the natural world in its a priori reified proportions and where the nature's distress call is harked back as Ledbetter posits, "An ethic of writing is to discover and make heard silenced voices; an ethic of reading is to hear those voices" (1). Hence, Chambial's poetry through the ecocritical lenses makes the silenced nature and the space therein heard. The poem "Time is More Powerful" begins with the description of a pleasing scene of flowers blooming, clouds thundering and seeds sprouting which is an effortless painting of the natural world glorifying its beauty:

With the thundering clouds
Over the mountains
Flowers bloom
Seeds sprout
Rivers thunder past" (Words 35: 1-5)

The same is followed by a doleful picture of sickness and anguish of an anemic patient

I've seen in quivering cold
Supporting the lingering bones
Swooning
An anaemic patient.
Sun rises
And sets.
The eternal wheel moves on. (Words 35: 6-12)

The movement from a rosy picture to the grimmer one is gradual and a conventional poetic reading would have struck upon the glaring metaphor of joy and sadness and the redundant cycle of seasons epitomizing the circle of karma, but an ecocritical reading would restore the image of the clouds and the mountains and the flowers as they are and not something as random abstractions of *joie de vivre*.

The façade and the externality of the nature too

holds an epistemological relevance wherefrom newer (and differential) versions of cultural and social ideologies may stem and contribute towards turning the collectivizing myths of race, culture, gender, nation, nation-state, etc. turtle. The phenomenon and the compositional terms of weather and environment as prevalent upon ecology viz. flowers, clouds, seeds, etc. have their bearings upon the (mini)economies of the topography in providing the discursive leeway to the text of the poem and hence, in a processual methodology, creates a (micro)climate rejecting the theologies forging (meta)narratives of its own. Of course, the rains and the water-lashes are indispensable to the agrarian economic pattern, the indiscretion of which is a problematization for the ecological nourishment of the provincial. The rains and other wholesome natural occurrences are the requisites for water bodies like rivers for irrigation and domesticities and, hence, their preservation is the unconscious ideological decree of the poet in the current poem and the logical vocation of ecocriticism. Similarly, it is the sprouting of seeds in the poem which acquires a different academic location when seen through literary archetypes (interpreted/ bracketed invariably with the legendary fertility myths, cycle of seasons and birth-death-rebirth grind) while the seeds and their innate potency in evolutionary senses is priceless to the local production regime. The poet's 'sprouting of the seeds' is thereby processed in the ecocentric perspective of critical regimen as a significant codification of the supremacy of seeds in the social, economic and cultural renaissance of his expanse. And it is the sustenance and growth of the idyllic and the politico-social vouching for the pastoral which lends the hypothetical locale of the poem (surmised invariably from the poet's belongingness to a hill state) a character, a prominence to insure their economic dynamics. Hence, it

is not the fantastic alertness to the concept of the natural world with an archaic mandate of aesthetic therapy attached to the banalities and the literal prose of real world but the factual and the hardcore which ecocriticism espouses. The poet's own intentions of writing a poem in the conventional trope and vehicle mold notwithstanding, ecocriticism promotes a renegade adversarial discourse whereby reading is granted the autonomy from the historical abstractions of the liberal humanism while evaluating literature, experientially and politically. By alloying the molecules of precision while monitoring nature, ecocentric perspective in the present poem rejects the social constructivism and linguistic determinism of the literary theories (as professed by Barry) which could have easily constructed a social praxis of emotions and idea typical to literary appreciations. Also, since there is no problematization of language paradigm forging a connect between the signifier and signified and other patternistic attributes of language involved, the objects of the nature stick to a natural objectivity free from the theoretical subjectivism. Language, thus, doesn't construct or deconstruct any text to buy textual austerity or bohemianism, but enjoys, for the first time, a naked truth paralleling the joys of serendipity and the enlightenment age. Hence, the description of the natural objects by language is a pure linguistic delicacy countering any (pathetic) fallacy and literary abstractions of the yore.

The iconoclastic character of Ecocritical poetics becomes more tangible while forging the imagination of entropy and symbiosis theorizations which have done the rounds of material and physical sciences as the core empirical knowledge. Ecocriticism thrives upon a generous intertextuality between different epistemologies when the welding of science and humanities takes place to generate a historic conceptualization.

Entropy is the scientific paradigm for the negative energy in an enclosed space leading towards disorganization and breakdown from within while symbiosis suggests a mutually sustaining co-existing system which holds the things together. The first stanza in the poem embodies an idyll, painting a soothing picture of natural constituents which reaches its culmination in the third stanza of the poem where the poet reverts to a spirited expectation of youth, mirth and a hopeful sign for the future:

Youth a varied-hued-juicy-spring
 Leads to the sun-burnt mirth.⁷
 Wail not the pensive past,
 Nor hail the present might,
 Meditate upon the unborn future. (Words, 35: 13-17)

Looking at the structure of the poem, it is easy to locate the second stanza as a site territorialized as isolated entropic system with no synergy whatsoever with the prevailing wider biosphere with its morbid inflection of “quivering cold”, “lingering bones” and “anemic patient” mortified further by the setting of the sun. The ailing patient in the hostile weather with decrepit bones is a negative energy which the poem exudes and which also is an ugly aspect of the nature and its cracking impact upon the human life span. The time-passage effects an entropic impact upon the life of the man and an ecosystem is reflected which is beyond recovery rushing to its self-destruction and ontological anxiety. It is this marked reality of the nature which disrupts the symbiotic placement of the first and the last stanza which express a remote sense of hope and well being for the world devoid of bioethics.

Ecocritical reading, hence, wedges its way into the territory of environmental anxiety and establishes

an ironic algebra which interrogates the brevity and ailments of human life (precipitated by the mechanical fondness) and the eternity attached to nature without making a vehicle out of images to reach a convenient tenor retrospective of symbolism and imagism of the previous generation of critics. The element of scientific inquiry and according interpretation is, thus, a liberating factor for the Ecocritical poetics striving to displace the tougher semantics of literary theory and the older versions of nature and culture criticism.

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Dr. Rohit Phutela: Assistant Professor, Department of English, DAV College, Sector 10, Chandigarh.

Gender-linked language variation in Khortha: A Case Study

- *Swati Priya&**Rajni Singh

Abstract

Gender and language have always been connected. Women and men do not use completely different forms but different qualities and frequencies of form. Gender studies have shown that language users have a wide range of beliefs and knowledge about language that go beyond the rules and representations of specifying grammar. The social roles that men and women play, their different values and social networks and their sensitivity to contextual factors including characteristics of the person they are talking to are relevant factors in accounting for people's speech patterns. A light on the language variation in Khortha has been thrown through this paper, which tries to illustrate that the language do varies; their forms do change and ultimately decide the future of any language. The paper will also discuss that how the variation in the speech patterns of males and females is one of the factors to put Khortha in an endangered category.

Key Words: Language Variation, speech patterns, language endangerment, gender differentiation

Introduction

The major thing that distinguishes human beings from animals is basically our way to communicate with each other by using language. We have words for specific things, emotions, expressions and it appears as though we have words for everything when thinking about it. In each language; words are constructed in a

certain way. When working with language, it is quite possible to determine whether a word belongs to one stem or another just by looking at it even if the person has no clue of the word's meaning which is quite fascinating. Through time, society has gone through great changes which have influenced our languages. New vocabularies have been added to our languages and old-fashioned words have been replaced. Each language has its characteristics and reflects society to a great extent. Many studies have been carried out through the years. During the 1970's, vast sociolinguistic investigations were made and one focused mainly on syntactic, phonology and morphology variations. At first, gender was regarded as a sociolinguistic variable, just like social class, age, ethnicity and social status. It was not until the midst 70's when Robin Lakoff's essay Language and Woman's Place was released, science about gender and language was established (Lakoff, 1975. In Nordenstam, 2003:10).

According to Tannen (1995:138), "communication isn't as simple as saying what you mean. How you say what you mean is crucial, and differs from one person to the next, because using a language is a learned behavior: how we talk and listen are deeply influenced by cultural expectations". One of the important topics, therefore, that has engaged the minds of many sociolinguists in recent years is the connection between the structure and the use of languages and the social roles of the men and women who speak them. It seems, in general, that all known societies appear to use language as one of the means of marking out gender differences.

Research on language and gender interaction is well into its third decade and the related review of

literature has shown that males and females tend to differ in face-to-face speech and in written language (e.g., Lackoff 1990, Mulac 1989, Tannen(1990). When working with language one sometimes hears the expressions “female language” and “male language”. Are females speaking in a special way in comparison with males or do the expressions, female and male language, refer to something else? Since society changes the use of language must certainly change too due to the fact that language reflects society. If differences are to be found, are they related specifically to gender or are we actually talking about status and power?

The basic aim of this paper is to give some possible answers whether one can find differences between male’s and female’s way of using language. Furthermore, is it possible to find differences between different age groups coming from the same gender? By looking back at history as well as presenting research about language and gender, this paper will raise questions about our way to communicate.

II. Variations in Language

Focusing on variations in language Reza Ghafar Samar in his essay *The Gender-linked Differences in the Use of Linguistic Strategies* has highlighted that there is a long history to refer to when it comes to the general opinion about the way women should behave and speak. He further adds that even the philosopher Sophocles himself is supposed to have uttered something like ‘silence gives the proper grace to women’ which gives the image of a good woman as a silent woman in the western tradition(Kaplan,1976:28). In other words, if a woman is expected to be quiet, then any woman who opens her mouth can be accused

of being talkative (Spender, 1989:9). A silent woman is held up as an ideal which is cherished in the old English proverb: ‘Silence is the best ornament of a woman’.

In order to find some possible answers about gender differences in language one has to go back in time and look at the historical background. Old letters, novels, diaries and poems provide us with evidence of folk linguistic beliefs regarding gender differences in language. Jennifer Coates, a well-known linguist, makes a really important reflection: “In other words, academics and scholars are as much the product of the times they live in as are non-academics, and their work on language can be as subject to prejudice and preconception as are the comments of lay people” (Coates, 1993:16). Women’s subordinate role in society is explained by the Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith and she says that the differences between men and women have their ground in our way of living and our way of organizing society (Klein, Steinberg, 1989:3).

III. Linguistic Change

One of the linguistic consequences of gender differentiation in language seems to be linguistic change, where men’s and women’s language are regularly associated with changes in language. When it comes to the linguistic study of changes within language it is quite recently sociolinguistic factors have been taken into consideration. According to Coates, linguistic change occurs in the context of linguistic heterogeneity. Before we claim that a linguistic change has taken place, a new linguistic form has to be used by some sub-group within a speech community. Furthermore, this new form has to be ‘adopted’ by other members of that community and accepted as the norm. It is possible to find linguistic variation in all known

societies. A great many factors affect people's way of speech. One aspect is social variation[1] which usually distinguishes people's affiliation regarding social class. There is also something called stylistic variation[2] which refers to the speech of a given individual in different contexts. When studying language in its social context one focuses on linguistic variation, which is to a great extent dependent on the environment the speaker finds him or herself in. The speech of different individuals varies depending on age, gender, social class and ethnic groups. Regardless of whether the speaker is a man or a woman it appears to be the right assumption to believe that the speaker adjusts him or herself to the situation in order to 'fit in'. In other words, the way we speak is influenced by several factors. During the nineteenth-century, the neo-grammarians[3] argued that linguistic change was caused by the twin mechanisms of sound change and analogy. The neo-grammarians claimed that the sound change altered the system and analogy made the system regular again. While the neogrammarians were quite convinced in their belief, there was another group of linguists who were very much convinced of another explanation for the changes within language, namely, the functionalists[4]. They 'argued that change occurs because of the opposing demands of the need to communicate and the desire to make as little effort as possible'(Coates, 1993:168-170). These two different ways of viewing the possible causes of changes in language give a clear picture of two competing convictions where both parties show great interest in language. In 1922, H.T. Moore found that men talked about their work far more frequently than did women. Since women did not usually work outside their home at that time, it was quite natural that men used words

more linked to their work outside their home. According to Moore, the vocabulary associated with work was to be regarded as serious, while women's vocabulary was just trivial (Spender: 1980:34). Just like Jespersen, Moore did have a point in his discussion because at that time, it is likely to assume that women's language was more narrowed and restricted.

The present study is an attempt to provide a report on daily interaction and inter personal communication in Khortha language. To carry out the study male-female communications were examined in terms of their day to day conversation, their selection of words, phrases and expressions in their speech and the influence of the outside language on their speech.

The data of the study were collected through interviews and observations. The data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential analysis. The results of the study indicate that there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of their linguistic behavior. There is a considerable linguistic variation one can observe in their speech.

People have always known that gender and language used are connected. Women and men do not use completely different forms but different qualities or frequencies of form. Research shows that women tend to use more of standard forms than men do, while men use more vernacular forms than women do. Gender itself is an influential factor accounting for different pattern among men and women.

Gender studies have shown that language users have a wide range of beliefs and knowledge about language that go beyond the rules and representation of specifying grammars.

The social role men and women play, their

different values and social networks and their sensitivity to contextual factors including characteristics of the person they are talking to are relevant factors in accounting for people's speech patterns.

According to Trudgill (2000) gender differentiation in language arises because language as a social phenomenon is closely related to social attitudes. Men and women are socially different, in that society lays down different social roles for them and expects different behavioral patterns from them.

For the present study a group of five males and five females of varying age groups were taken into consideration. The respondents were divided into various categories keeping in mind the age and education. Through this study there is an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1) Is there a significant difference between males and females in the use of linguistic strategies in face-to-face communication?
- 2) Is there a significant difference between educated males and educated females in the use of linguistic strategies in face-to-face communication?
- 3) Is there a significant difference between educated males and less educated females in the use of linguistic strategies in face-to-face communication?
- 4) Is there a significant difference between less educated males and educated females in the use of linguistic strategies in face-to-face communication?

As the categories for the study was based on two variables: AGE and EDUCATION, an attempt was made

to put all the respondents into the categories of:

- a. Educated
- b. Semi educated
- c. Illiterate

The age range of the participants was between 25 and 40. All the male respondents and one female respondent were bilingual speaking Khortha and Hindi. Rest four female respondents were monolingual. They could only converse in Khortha.

Education can be considered as a significant factor in the distinction of the speech between male and female. The following example illustrates the speech of two female respondents (Surji Devi, 50 years old, illiterate & Meena Devi, 35 years, illiterate) and one male respondent (Diwakar Mehto, 31 years, intermediate):

- a. F: hamra dheepal-dheepal chah dihe
M: hamara garam-garam chai de
H: Mujhe garam-garam chai do
E: Please give me hot tea
- b. F: gayich kayit delo
M: ped kat delo
H: Usne ped kaat diya
E: He has cut the tree

(F- Female, M-Male, H- Hindi, E-English)

After analyzing the speech of the Female respondents and the male respondent we can clearly see that the speech of Females is more pure and original in nature as compared to the male respondents. The words like dheepal and, gayich for gara(hot) and ped(tree) have been directly taken from Khortha. But the response of the male is more influenced from Hindi, or rather these are the Hindi words substituted in the place of Khortha. The collected data has been tabulated in the following manner:

Sentences	Males	Females
Jis ladke ne kaanch toda usko bulao (Call that boy who has broken the glass)	/je/ /gId3rta:/ /ka:nch/ /pho:d^lkau/ /se/ /gId3ta:/ /ke/ /bula:/	/je/ /gId3rta:/ /ka:nch/ /pho:rh3u/ /sei/ /gId3ta:/ /ke/ daik/
Jis ladke ne kaanch toda usko bulao (Call that boy who has broken the glass)	/je/ /gId3rta:/ /ka:nch/ /pho:d^lkau/ /se/ /gId3ta:/ /ke/ /bula:/	/je/ /gId3rta:/ /ka:nch/ /pho:rh3u/ /sei/ /gId3ta:/ /ke/ daik/
Kaanch toot gayi (The glass has been broken)	/ka:nch/ /tu:t/ /gel3i/	/ka:nchta:/ /tu:it/ /gel3i/
Bachha ye khana nahi kahyega (The boy will not eat this food)	/i:/ /kha:na:/ /gid3rta:/ /n3hi:/ /khaeto/	/i:/ /kha:ye/ /gid3rta:/ /n3ye/ / khaeto:/
Kal main chor se bahut maar khaya (Yesterday I was beaten brutally by the thief)	/ka:l/ /hum/ /chor/ /se/ /b3hUt/ /ma:r/ /kha:ye/	/ka:ilh/ /h3me/ /chor/ /se/ /b3di:/ /ma:r/ /khaelho:/
Ye topi safed rang ki hai (This cap is white in colour)	/i:/ /topi:/ /s3fed/ /hel3i	/i:/ /topi:/ /sa:da:/ /h3l3i

Table 1: Response Sheet of Males and Females marking Gender Differences

Sentences	Males	Females
Masoom(Innocent)	/ma:su:m/	/ch3ua:/
Dulha (groom)	/dUlha:/	/bo:r/
Jala diya (have got burnt)	/j3laI/ /del3i/	/j3ra:I / /del3i/
Sabji "(cooked vegetables)	/s3bji/	/ti:m3n/

Table 2: Response Sheet of males and Females marking Gender Differences

From the above data it can be observed that the female respondents being less exposed to outer world make use of the words and expressions which are pure in form. The responses that they gave were more close to the original form of Khortha. In contrast the male members used words that are influenced from Hindi: /s3bji:/ for cooked vegetables as compared to /ti:m3n/ used by female respondents. The reason for the distinction in the language of female respondents could be the lack of exposure and very little or no interaction with the people of other speech communities. Some more examples:

Words/ Sentences	Educated Males	Semi-educated/ no education females
Sari(traditional wear for females in India)	/sa:ri/	/lUgga:/
Dhul (dust)	/dhu:l/ dust	/dhu:ra:/
Dhoop	/dhu:p/	/r3uda:/
Kanghi(comb)	/k3nghi:/	/k3k3ba:/
Anda(egg)	/3nda:/	/di:m/
Bael(ox)	/bael/	/b3r3d/
Wah baithe baithe thak gaya (he is tired of sitting)	/u:/ /b3ith3le/- /b3ith3le/ /th3k/ /gele/	/u:/ /b3is3le/ /b3is3le// thai:k/ / gel3i/-
Wah kabhi na kabhi jarur aayega(He will definitely come back some day)	/u:/ /k3kh3no/ /n3/ /k3kh3no/ /z3ru:r/ /aeto/	/u:/ /k3kh3no/ /nae/ /k3kh3no/ /ghu:r/ /ke/ /aeto/

The above sentences clearly state the variation in the speech of the educated males and semi or uneducated females. The reasons are immense. The males in order to earn their livelihood have to move out of their place. They go to nearby cities like Dhanbad and Calcutta to do business or work to take care of their family. Their speech is bound to be affected by the other languages like Hindi, Bengali, Maithili and Bhojpuri. The elderly females on the other hand are living in their communities. They hardly or never go out of their village. The result is that their speech

remains unaffected.

There is also one remarkable fact that if we compare the speech of a young male speaker and an elderly female speakers we will get to see some interesting facts. Following are the examples:

Words	Old	Young
Jhanda(flag)	/jhaanda/	./jh^nda/
Barish (rain)	/b^rsa	/pa:ni
Rasta (path)	/d3h3r/	rasta:/
Ghar (house)	/kh^nd	/ru:m/
Turant (immediately)	/ekh3ni:/	/tUr3te/
Mitaana / saaf karna (to clean)	/mita:e/	/sa:f/
Kapda(cloth)	/ pi:dh3na:/	/k^p3da:/
Chehra (face)	/thoth3na/	/s3k3l/
Ungali(fingers)	/a:ngUr/	/Ungri:/
Chabhi(keys)	/ka:thi:/	/cha:bhi:/
Sach(truth)	/nIshto/	/s^cche/
Gilas(glass)	/gIlsa:/	/gila:s/-
Lamba(tall)	/da:nga:/	/l^mba:/
Chipchiba (sticky)	/la:tha:/-	/ch^t3k/
Ek jaisa(same to same)	/oh3te/	/eke r^k3m

Some interesting facts can be observed that the speech of the young boy aged 21 years is influenced by Hindi. He is in graduation and studies in one of the colleges of Dhanbad. He interacts with the speakers of other speech communities. The blame cannot be put on the speakers only, but the education system of India is such that the children and youth are forced to study in other languages apart from their MT. Prabhat K Singh in his article 'Nurturing Linguistic Diversity in Jharkhand' (2014) throws the light on the education system prevailing in India, says 'that it is a well-known fact children understand concepts in their MT or in their first language; but the education system in India has largely failed to provide education to children in their own language'. He also adds to the point saying 'the tribal children are forced to study in the dominant

regional languages like Hindi or English.' The question arises whether it is the forced one or the opted one, but the fact cannot be denied that the children first language is affected through other languages. The youngsters are more exposed to the technical advancements, to the speakers of other languages. During conversation in Kortha the sheer inability to make use of the words in his/her language and substituting it with Hindi or English is the most common problem. Though it appears to be a common problem but can be one step towards Language shift or death of the language. The situation is bad with the people going out for their job and business but it is worst with the young speakers who cannot even read and write in Kortha and rely on the English/Hindi translations of the words they make use of in their conversation. Just two generations of this dilution and we will have a large pool of the speakers who cannot even speak read or write in Kortha. With it, this successive march of incremental cultural deaths takes one step closer to total extinction.

In 1922, H.T. Moore found that men talked about their work far more frequently than did women. Since women did not usually work outside their home at that time, it was quite natural that men used words more linked to their work outside their home. According to Moore, the vocabulary associated with work was to be regarded as serious, while women's vocabulary was just trivial (Spender: 1980:34). Just like Jespersen, Moore did have a point in his discussion because at that time, it is likely to assume that women's language was more narrowed and restricted.

While examining the impact of public/private domains on the speakers of Kortha, it was found that the men exhibit greater mobility which has affected the originality of their language while the women have

lesser access to the outer world which has enabled them to keep the purity of their language intact. At the site of interaction with different language speakers, the male Kortha speakers consciously/ unconsciously pick up foreign words, terms and expressions and tend to mix it with their mother tongue- thus producing hybridity. It was found that their speech was a mix of other languages to which they are more exposed to or to which they are making maximum utilization of. The words like:

Words	Males	Females
glass (mirror)	Kanch	Sisha
Bulana(to call)		Daik, hakai
	Bula	
Khana(cooked food)	Khana	Khayek
Jalana(to burn)	Jalaya	Jaraya
paisa(money)	Paisa	Taka
Talab(lake)	Talab	Bandh
Jaldi (quick)	Jaldi	Chane
Garmi(hot weather)	Garam	Gumar

According to Coates, the sociolinguist has to deal with real language data from a wide variety of situations. Dell Hymes (1922) used the term communicative competence for the first time. This concept marks the beginning of this revival of interest in language in its broadest sense. Dell claimed that it was essential to incorporate social as well as cultural factors into linguistic description. To have communicative competence means so much more than knowing what is right in a grammatical sense. One needs to know how to speak, when to speak and when it is time to be quiet. As a speaker, one needs to know, for example, when it is time to pause in a conversation and give room for other speaker/s. One simply needs to know what is appropriate to do or say at a specific

moment in a conversation.

Some researchers connect politeness in language with women and their communicative competence. One researcher named Gleason (1980) made a study on child language, where she focused on the way parents teach 'polite language' to their children. She found that parents were consistent in convincing their children to respond with socially appropriate items, such as greetings and thank you. Both parents were eager for their children using polite language but provided different models. It turned out that the mothers themselves used far more polite language than the fathers which was also observed by the children.

Conclusion

Many experts are convinced that there are differences between women's and men's way of speech. However, there are those who deny the possibilities of differences in speech. They do not believe in certain differences, instead they claim that the differences are random and have nothing to do with the gender of the speaker. But one cannot deny the fact that language do varies, the changes can be observed in terms of the linguistic capabilities of the males and the females. This paper was an attempt to study the language variation based on gender differences. To carry out the study males' and females' conversations in a specific setting were studied and analyzed. Based on the results of the study the following conclusions are drawn:

a. The speech of the females is closer to the pure variety of Khortha, while the speech of the male respondents contains a blend of different linguistic influences.

b. Education plays a significant role in the language variation. The speech of the educated males were different from the uneducated females.

c. The age of language speakers plays a dominant role in linguistic variation. A considerable difference in the speech of a young boy and an elderly female has been observed.

An overall impression that can be drawn from the presented data is that there is a wide variation in the speech of young male speakers, the educated males and elderly males largely owing to the influences of other languages like Hindi and Maithili. But lesser variation is noticed in the speech of the young females, uneducated females and housewives; their speech is closer to the pure variety of Khortha as compared to male speakers. Thus it can be said that gender differences do play an instrumental role in language variation. Though at the morphological level more purity is exhibited in the speech of female speakers while at the syntactic level male speakers show more accuracy. Language variation observed in Khortha is a result of gender differences, socio-cultural climate, education and age.

Suggestions for Further Studies

This study explored gender linked differences in the use of linguistic strategies in face-to-face communications. It seems that it could be significant if gender linked differences in written communication such as letters and e-mails are investigated as well. Also, gender linked differences in communication strategies used by males and females in different circumstances need to be explored.

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- Swati Priya is a research fellow in the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Dhanbad.
- Rajini Singh (Corresponding Author) is Associate Professor of English at I.I.T. Dhanbad, Jharkhand, Email : rajinisingh18@hotmail.com

C.L. Khatri's Poetry Collection *For You to Decide* : An Estimation

Dr. Kumar Chandradeep

Dr. C.L. Khatri is a celebrated critic, bilingual poet and editor. He has been editing and publishing, the well-known bi-annual journal of English studies, Cyber Literature, for the last twenty years. He is a prolific writer with five poetry collections and twenty books on literary criticism. *For You to Decide* (2016) is the fifth poetry collection of Dr. Khatri which consists of fifty one poems of high poetic quality. His other poetry collections are- *Kargil* (2000), *Ripples in the Lake* (2006), *Two Minute Silence* (2014) and *Goolar Ka Phool* in Hindi (2011).

For You to Decide deals with all aspects of life- love, compassion, pathos, personal and social relationship, exploitation of weak and poor, moral decline, terrorism, corruption and religious hypocrisy. Despite the depiction of dismal scenario, there is always a glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel that things would ultimately change for the better.

The title of the collection is quite appropriate and suggestive. In this collection we have got a vast range of poetry. In Dr. Khatri's poems "Love for Nature" is quite evident which reminds us of William Wordsworth. There are mystic elements and imagery in his poetry where we get the profound influence of William Blake. In this collection, the poet has frequently used the poetic devices- similes, metaphors, personification, satire, irony, symbols and imagery to heighten the poetic effect. The poet has successfully used the imagery from science and introduced metaphysical elements in some of his poems in this volume which testifies to the impact of John Donne on him.

The title of the poem For you to Decide is itself self explanatory. What is constantly reasserted-sometimes by rhetorical questions, sometimes by the poet addressing himself or his soul is the absoluteness of all that shares the medium of time :

"Sometimes I wonder
if Vamana's legs are
what men need to measure
the infinite space of time ?....
Sometimes I wonder
If Bharata's nine rasas would be programmed.
if babies would be sold in shops
You want umbilical cord or warranty card ?
This is for you to decide...." (19-20)

In the poem "Mask" the poet is craving for resurrection. The poet makes a passionate appeal to the present generation, who are having double faces, that to get rid of the 'mask', which we wear, in order to find the real identities in the world :

"I was tired of wearing you
Changing you as I changed clothes....
Off with masks today
I am bliss, peace and truth-
a refugee without refuge....
I am happy today
They burnt all the masks
On the funeral pyre." (13)

In spite of depiction of desolate picture of life, the poet hints at a glimmer of hope in poems such as "Flames Within", "Suck my Sap", "I have God", "Writing a New Ramayana", "Pangs of Parting" and "Chessboard". The poet makes apt use of recurrent symbols and images drawn from the vast expanse of nature and images are mainly visual; and sonorous effect of love, peace and harmony with nature is rendered in sing-song rhythm.

The saying 'Art lies in concealing art' stands true to most of his poems. Take for example his poem "Poetry Wants to Stand With You" :

"When flower is deflowered
buds crushed under perverted feet
Nirbhaya's cry paint the pages of sky
Poetry lights a candle." (46)

The Volume seems to have been designed to represent the different facets of his Muse : poems of social concern like Nirbhaya Rape Case, corruption, terrorism, moral devaluation, breaking bond in society, occasional poems, poems exploring his innerself and poems on abstract themes such as - "Fertile Farming", "Timid Tongue", "Navratri" Postcolonialism" and "Religion". In the poem "Religion", the poet emphasizes that each religion teaches us the lesson of humanity, love, sacrifice, compassion and brotherhood through symbols and imagery :

"Religion-
dawn of a new sun
morning shining face of a baby
Religion-
warm breath of a beloved
Song of a rich harvest....
Religion-
Knowledge of Buddha
the Cross of the Christ, Ayah to Mohammad." (41)

Dr. Khatri's concern and compassion for suffering humanity and his expose of hypocrisy and corruption is noteworthy in the poems- "Justify the Death", "Statistics of Suicide", "Deluge of Development" and "Sometimes I Dream". In the poem "Drama of Death", the poet laments over the terrorist attack in Mumbai :

"I am Akhalaq
I know no pain, have no fear

no haze, no maze
drama of death, lyre of fire
epitaph on the tomb look
crystal clear from here....
Dadri becoming a tourist destination.
Why don't you impose a toll tax
on tourist, levy on savvy bites in the air ?
Sell the story to Sidney Sheldon
Set up huts for the visitors
Nearer the temple dearer the charges." (53)

Love is a favourite theme with all poets irrespective of their social and political commitments. In the poem "Love", the poet has given a firm message to mankind that to get true love one should always be prepared for sacrifice :

"Very ruefully he returned to the stump
'Sorry friend', I seek you for a plough
or else we will die of hunger....
The love spoke, "In it lies my fulfillment".
Now there is no stump, no new tree;
but the peasants turns to it everyday." (25)

In "Waiting for a Vishnu", the poet has satirically condemned the increasing use of scientific gadgets like 'robot' in the factories and household works at global level. He says :

"The devotee turns devil
boon becomes bane-
a threat to the Lord.
The brain powered robot
in the avatar of Bhasmasur
Humans wait for a Vishnu." (52)

The poet argues in a "Haiku" that it is the inner nature of an individual that makes one reflect upon thing before him. He says :

"Parched earth awaits rain
Teachers awaits rain of grant
Grace of almighty." (76)

And is his another "Haiku" the poet embarks on secularism :

"Birds are secular
Each day perch on church, mosque."
Feast and nest in temple." (79)

The poetic world of the anthology is not confined to the crass commercialism of the materialist world of today but it also focuses upon some remedies of the contemporary ills. What makes the anthology score advantage over other books is its attempt at explicating the fact that Indian English Poetry is not a mimetic representation of the Western canonical tradition of poetry and 'poiesis'. It, in fact, represents the complex cultural, political, religious, economic and social situations of Indian realities.

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Dr. Kumar Chandradeep, Professor & Head P. G. Dept. of English, College of Commerce, Arts & Science, Patna

Whitman's Innovative Verse Technique: A Critical Approach

Ram Niwas Sharma

With regard to the representation of an object Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) expresses doubt whether a true representation is ever possible. If all representations are embedded in the language, culture and institutions of the representation then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is implicated, intertwined, interwoven with a great many other things besides the "truth" which is itself a representation. Despite the inherent pitfalls involved in a representation; it is incumbent on an intellectual to mention some pragmatic descriptions of the issue.

Whitman may be regarded as the father of 'verse-libre or free verse' in American Literature. To a certain extent in this respect, his free verse may be compared with the poetic prose of Rabindranath Tagore. But the obvious difference is as Emerson pointed out, that Whitman's vocabulary was a remarkable mixture of journalism (the *New York Herald*) and the *Bhagwad Geeta*. In other words the range of Whitman in regard to phrase, rhythm and diction is wider and freer as compared to Rabindranath Tagore.

Revolutionary poets stride along the beaten path. They leave behind the marks of newness and unconventionalism. They are remembered as epoch makers and harbingers of their time. T.S.Eliot stirred the world of poetry by creating his work *The Waste Land*, Walt Whitman took the world by surprise by writing his monumental book *Leaves of Grass*. With the emergence of Walt Whitman American poetry got a strong foothold and became more persuasive, creating a milestone in the history of world literature.

Leaves of Grass is a departure from the conventional poetry. The eminent poet needed wide range to accommodate his long lines. The absence of titles, the unconventional punctuation, the use of unpoetic vocabulary with vigour and sweep heralded a new era of poetry.

But it must be borne in mind that Whitman more than Wordsworth gave a new turn to English poetry and prose. This does not mean that Whitman's verse is all prosaic, halting and devoid of poetic rhythm. Whitman's genius was epic. He did not organize his poetic material into any conventional pattern. The pattern of his poetry has formlessness and wildness, even chaotic like the *Leaves of Grass*.

The convention of rhyming or metrical verse did not suit Whitman. He needed an idiom, which was picked up from the life of the common man in America. But it is not totally correct that his language is absolutely the colloquial language spoken by the people of America. Although he used some of the colloquialism, the sources of his style lie in the flowing rhythm of the Old Testament, in the blank verse of Shakespeare's plays from which he got his elaborate sentence structure. Further he had studied the French and Italian opera which were both lyrical and declamatory.

As we know he does not make use of metre, rhythm but he believes in alliteration, assonance, internal rhythm and other such devices. If one carefully examines his structure, one notices sometimes a general trochaic and dactylic pattern. It reveals a subtle use of caesura bringing the long lines into parts of different lengths. But it also shows a very effective play of repetition of rhyming patterns and words.

Whitman used unconventional language which is equally suited to his prose. As Jones E Miller points

out, “Whitman was the first poet in history to explain the possibilities of free verse. And there is rare compatibility between his form and his themes, the long, unrestrained line in its free flow captures in its very form the spirit of democracy and freedom that Whitman breathed into his verses. However, his poetry represented radical departures from the past. At the same time it kept firm hold on many poetic traditions. A glance on any page of *Leaves of Grass* reveals the use of such standard devices as assonance, alliteration, repetition, in verse word order, parallelism, and many others. He freed his poetry from the measured foot. His poetry is filled with a rhythm of its own, strong in the ear even if elusive to the eye. His free verse captures the very rhythms of American speech and reflects the American freedom and break from tradition. The movement of his verse is the sweeping movements of great currents of living people.

Whitman’s is the art which conceals art. He uses ‘free verse’ but that does not mean that he is lawless. He believes in freedom that does not degenerate into license. His verse still has rhythms but they are speech rhythm. His unit of rhythm is the phrase instead of foot. His unit of thought is the line instead of sentence. The most notable features of his verse are repetition, parallelism and a highly charged rhetorical tone. Whitman’s poetry constantly reminds one of the rhythmical chants of the Psalms and of the sonorous, impassioned tones of contemporary orators and Evangelical preachers.

Both his verse and his diction are suited to create the effects he aimed at, and to convey his message. He is a highly original and revolutionary poet. His technique has exercised tremendous influence on the technique of the 20th century poetry both the England and America. Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* ushered in

significant era in the history of American poetry. The language the poetry has always been a fertile ground for controversy. Whether it should be ‘language such as men do use’ the language of the common man or the traditional diction of poetry has been a much discussed question. Whitman’s intention in writing poetry was to reform both the form and the content of poetry. Whitman called *Leaves of Grass* a language experiment.

As regards the form of poetry Whitman says the artist is to develop a form as closely analogous as possible to organic growth; “to imitate not simply nature’s work but her ways of working-to enter in the spirit of the universe by aiming at fullness and variety without end”. This view of Whitman’s account for one of the characteristic features of his poetry-the numerous long catalogues. These are poet’s attempts to give expression to the “fullness and variety of nature.”

In conformation with his above mentioned theory Whitman developed a poetic style devoid of conventional rhythm and metre. He employed the line instead of the foot as the stylistic unit. His poetry depends upon parallelism and other reiterative devices, its structure and cadence. The King James Version of the Bible has formative influence on Whitman. But it would be an exaggeration to call the Bible the actual source of Whitman’s poetic form. However, it offers a convenient analogy for understanding it. Another influence on him is the blank verse of Shakespeare’s plays.

The exotic flavor of Whitman’s poetry is the result of his sprinkling pages with Italian, French and Spanish terms as well as Sanskrit terms from the *Bhagwad Geeta*. Emerson described Whitman’s vocabulary as a remarkable mixture of the *Bhagwad Geeta* and The

New York Herald.

He rejected the metrical forms and rhyme and conventional stanzaic structure. "Pioneers" makes use of the four-lined stanza and regular metrical patterns.

Come my ten faced children
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready,
Have you yours pistol? Have you your sharp edged axes?
Pioneers; O, Pioneers!

"O captain! My captain" is also a remarkable poem not merely because of its intrinsic merits but because of its metrical regularity as well. These poems show that Whitman was quite capable of wielding the regular conventional meter of English poetry.

The subject of his poetry is unusual and daringly original. All the domains of the body and soul lent themselves to poetical treatment at his hands. So he needed a diction and a technique equally daring, equally free from the shackles of conventionality. It was in his role as a technical innovator that Whitman influenced American poetry most. His influence is particularly noticeable in the works of poets like Lindsay and Sandburg. The 'new poetry' of the second decade of the 20th century in America owed a great deal to him. The poetic revolution of which he had been the prophetic voice hailed him as the liberator of poetry and the father of free-verse movement.

Alliteration, assonance and internal rhyme are employed with great skill in the poem 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking'. The structure of this poem is that of an opera, recitative, musical meditation, the song of the bird as lyric. He tried to break down the barriers of form between prose and poetry. But unit of rhythm in prose remains. His unit of thought is the phrase instead of the foot and sometimes his unit of thought is the line.

The most notable features of his verse are repetition, parallelism and rhythm. His style encouraged frequent preaching. That is why those critics who are brought up on the good tradition of English poetry are disgusted with him and his eccentricity. Again he makes use of fantastic words which he either coins or borrows from the French sources or American journalism, for example the word 'ensemble' which is hardly poetic is prevalent in most of his poems.

However, his poetic style must be judged by his best passages and by his best poems. His best poems, e.g. "Out of the Cradle Endlessly, Rocking", "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", "Captain O Captain", "Animals", "Patient", "Spider" etc have a superb beauty and subtlety of the masterpieces. In "Captain, O Captain" he shows Tennysonian manner of verbal melody and pictorial and dramatic art. In such poems he even uses rhyme and metre.

Leaves of Grass is a poetic work which fairly staggers us. It sets all the ordinary rules of criticism at defiance. It is a poem but it conforms to none of the rule by which poetry has ever been judged. It is not an epic nor an ode, nor a lyric, nor does its verse move with the measured pace of poetic feet—of iambic, trochaic, or dactyl, or spondee nor of final, or caesural pause, except by accident. The genius of a great intellectual is not in perpetuation and observance of established norms and ideologies. He creates a new vista of history in the field of poetry. He establishes himself as a great innovator as well as rebellion in the domain of American poetic tradition.

To sum up Whitman's style and technique, it will be wrong to say that he was a savage with a 'barbaric yawp' and had no art of a poet. Whitman certainly had

a power with phrases, an originating power which is as great as witnessed in Shakespeare, Homer and Dante. He is a poet of varied moods who saw grass as the flag of his disposition, who saw even the sordid aspects and heard the music of humanity.

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□

Ram Nivash Sharma, Dept. of English, Jehanabad College, Jehanabad

Poems

Killing the fattest calf.

O. N. Gupta, Raipur, (CG)

Exalting a son as sapphire,
a cash crop, a bonanza,
and daughter a white elephant,
is lying through teeth.
He may turn out a bull dog,
or a bloody fool,
who looks Chris Gaille himself
but insists on tying knot to Sonam Kapoor,
and she a Marie Curie, who knows?
This exaltation is an albatross
of our patriarchal society
having two large wings-
dowry and fetus killing.
But time has changed. He is
jaundiced. Sons we prefer
but daughters demonstrate decorum,
grant privileges to males
but daughters deliver dreams,
grow greenery and grace.
He is neither a phoenix
nor a Kohinoor,
and she not a shuttlecock,
to be hit from one to other court
unless he/she qualifies the test.
No use killing the fattest calf
for the prodigal son.

□

Nature knits her knickers nonchalantly

O.N.Gupta, Raipur (CG)

Nature knows no hurry, no emotion,
everything happens in slow motion,
she knits her knickers nonchalantly
as Penelope did with her web
while men exhibit impatience
when things go wrong,
shout and shriek flamboyantly.
Look how continents drift quietly,
cultures are cultivated,
bees collect honey patiently,
mountains rise noiselessly,
seasons shift their shorts,
buds bloom slowly,
blushing beauties buy time
to fuel their hubby's fire unnoticed,
dews drop silently,
rainbows arch horizons
and birds beat retreat at dusk.
Look how sun stretches its hands,
light penetrates all cracks and inlets
crawling down the walls,
bride blows musk smell gently through air,
and ships in silhouette swim into ken.
See how flamingoes scan shallows,
pumpkins swell bigger and fatter,
poets pick phrases and images,
lovers steal glances grammatically,
shadows lengthen leisurely,
twilight descends over horizons,
glaciers glide and glimmer,
drowsy eyelids droop,
age tiptoes without any noise,
only we show signs of tension
indignantly and grudgingly.

□

A Transition not so Smooth

Rajiv Khandelwal Agra

I have been waiting, waiting.
Till the very act of waiting
Consumed days

Like the wait
The police had to do endure
To arrest the self-styled godman
Accused of sexually assaulting a minor

Then a dream
Visits
Like the taxi waiting
Anxiously
Meter running

To quarry
From words
In your
Condensed mail

□

Book Review

***Prison Literature: A Global Perspective*, Editor Dr. Chhote Lal Khatri, Authorspress, New Delhi, Pp.- 213, Price Rs. 850/-**

A book on prison literature is twice welcome as it ventilates the woes of the prisoners and their thoughts create valuable literature. In India though there have been prison diaries and memoirs, prison literature as a genre is yet to come into being. The book is one such early bird to catch the literary stuff from the prison.

The book has 17 papers from well-known writers from India as well as abroad on different aspects of prison life together with the inmate's personal, political, humanitarian and philosophical thoughts. The writers include the prominent ones like Malory, Defoe, Oscar Wilde, Chekov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Alex La Gama, Soyinka, J.P., Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. The broad introduction by C.L. Khatri first classifies the prisoners chiefly as criminals and political dissenters. In his view physical detention does not lead to mental detention or mental slavery. It is such people who rebel against political subjugation and seek freedom from political, cultural, linguistic and historical colonization. Some such people express themselves in poetry, short stories, novels and memoirs. There are also a few who entertain metaphysical thoughts, Tilak's Geeta Rahasya is a case in point. The book presents examples of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte-d' Arthur*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, John Banyan's *The Pilgrim Progress*, Nelson Mandela's autobiography *Conversations with Myself*, Alex La Guma's *The Stone Country*, Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died*, J P's *My Prison Diary*, Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* and so on.

In 'Colonialism and Prison Poetry' Dr. Shaileshwar Sati Prasad has drawn both from Indian and African sources the voice of protest against colonial hegemony

and social arrogance. Dennis Brutus in his 'Letters to Martha' has poignantly described the human degradation of prisoners and sexual crimes committed in the prison. Though a condemned zone, prison has also been a fertile setting for writers and poets. Thus, Martin Luther translated The New Testament into German at Wartburg Castle, O. Henry wrote most of his stories in prison. The book has papers on *The Stone Country* by Dr. Sitaram Singh, on *The Discovery of India* by NDR Chandra, on *The Pilgrim's Progress* by Gurpreet Kaur, on *Wide Sargasso Sea* by S. Priyadarshini, on S.H. Jhabvala's *Poems Written in Prison* by Dr. Sudhir K. Arora, on the poems of C'esar Vallejo, on D.M. Zwelonke's novel *Robben Island*. Dr. N.S. Kullur's paper 'Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's the Geeta Rahasya. Magnum opus of Prison opens with Richard Lovelace's immortal lines :

Stone walls do not a prison make
Nor iron bars a cage....
The spotless mind and innocent
Calls a hermitage.

By citing the original lines from *The Geeta Kullur* has dwelt at length on the significance of those precepts given to Arjuna by Lord Krishna.

In one volume Dr. Khatri has incorporated practically all the major writers from prison. The papers on individual writers and their works are more than informative; they are illuminating and inspiring. They present both the demoralising and creative aspects of prison life. They are a proof that creative soul can't help pouring out their innermost feelings in whatever way possible to them.

The book establishes prison literature as an exclusive genre. It will serve as a valuable book for researchers, teachers and those interested in marginal and cultural studies. A prize enterprise on the part of the editor and the publisher.

Ram Bhagwan Singh

□

**Creation and Evaluation (Second Revised Edition) by
Dr Vijay Vishal, Popular Book Depot, Jaipur, 2014,
Pp 384, Rs 800/**

The book under review is a compilation of Vijay Vishali two previously published poetry collections from Writers Workshop, Kolkata namely *Speechless Messages* (1992) and *Parting Wishes* (2001) and published reviews on his books and seven previously published research papers on his poetry. The book is obviously designed to serve the purpose of researchers who are working or want to work on Indian English Poetry. So it is a useful compendium to Vijay Vishal. The primary concern of this review is his poetic creation rather than the bouquet.

Matthew Arnold defines poetry as a “criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.” It is undeniable that Vijay Vishal’s poetry like many others presents a criticism of life. The strength of poetic truth lies in ideas and high seriousness of vocation. Vijay Vishal’s poetry is a humble effort in that direction with a flair for verbal exuberance. He is a poet of social concern, protest against incongruities, sham and hypocrisy in human life and insensitiveness of the rich and the mighty towards the poor. The heart of the poet bleeds to see humanity dying in humans and he expresses his angst to release his fury and perhaps to see if poetry makes a difference. Whether it does or not, poet’s only weapon is poetry in this fight. Each poem in *Speechless Messages* explicitly carries a message through the simple portrayal of man’s attitude to man and to nature as if to say like Wordsworth “what man has made of himself”. Man in his ‘fetish feats/ Of his engineering acumen’ does not achieve greatness that the poet sets up as a benchmark in his very first poem “*Speechless Messages*” by citing the selfless acts

of benevolence from flower, earth, sun, cloud, trees, etc despite being relentlessly offended by humans. In “A Biting Question” he makes it a case of irony that animals are more faithful to their master than humans. To explore this dichotomy further he makes use of the device of irony and binary opposition at both verbal and concept levels. In “Wary Warning”, “Kitty Coquettes” the rich are projected as predators of the poor.

Vijay Vishal’s second poetry collection *Parting Wishes* is dedicated to the fond memories of his wife and he sets the tone and temper of the poems by quoting her parting words as it were: “jee chahata hai aapko/ jee bhar ke dekh loon” (Wish to enclose you/ in my enclosing eyes!) First three poems are about her and the poet nicely summed up her life in these words “Smile while alive/ And smile out of life!” This is the aphorism of life that he gets from his wife’s life and passes on to his readers. It is in this universality of the message that the significance of his personal poems lie. Other poems tread the same old line in its thematic and linguistic preoccupation. For example “Contradiction” laments the wide gap between the rich and the poor, social inequality among humans as in “Parallelism” or exploitation of women in “Luckless Lass”, or devolution of social, cultural values in life as in “Walking Shadows.” He effectively evokes the infertility syndrome that we come across in T S Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in lines like these:

Ah!
Man is lost
In concrete jungles
Of steep skyscrapers
Busy broadways
Crazy crowds
Of walking shadows...

He forcefully articulates the contradictions in life

showing sham and hypocrisy through a set of binary oppositions: “Look but do not see/ Hear but do not listen/ Sigh but do not feel...” His feminist concern is reflected in some of his poems like “Hubby”, “Irking Irony”, “Gender Bias”, “A Cycle”.

There is a moral purpose in his Muse and he leaves a message through a parable, images and symbols and sometimes directly. He ransacks Nature for imagery and his images are not just decorative but part of his mythopoic structure of poetry. He is critical of so many ills and odds of the society and of the super structure of the system beset with corruption and ill practices. But he never lapses into pessimism or takes an escape route; he takes on the vices of the system boldly and objectively. But at the same time he is motivating and charging the readers with a positive attitude to life at times at the risk of being preachy:

“Aspire high and strive higher,
Neither tire nor retire.”
Or
“Touch the topmost tip
Of all that lies ahead!”

Part II of the book provides sumptuous critical sources on his poetry in the form of reviews and research papers which are valuable for the study of Indian English poetry as well. A testimony to it is that my poetry is also referred to in one of the papers. Interestingly some of his poems reminded me of my own poems like ones on Kargil, Suicide and Holi. So I enjoyed reading his poetry and wished I should have gone through them at their first publication. It’s a late read but worth read and I hope he will continue the flame of poetry burning that his wife once lit.

Dr C L Khatri

□

U Atreya Sarma: *Sunny Rain-n-Snow (An Olio of Poetry for Pleasure)*, Patridge India, 2016.

Atreya Sarma’s debut poetry collection *Sunny Rain-n-Snow* takes hold of the readers with the poet’s felicity of language, conscious experiment with form and play with words and its methodical presentation of poems into 12 categories. He does not seem to carry any inhibition that in a debut work a writer may carry. He is a late entrant in the realm of poetry but he walks in on surer feet. Armed with an endorsing ‘Foreword’ by a seasoned poet Dr. Sunil Sharma and a few pre-publication comments by writers from India and abroad, the book comprises 63 poems on his myriad experiences of life in India and America. He tries to taste the different toasts of poetry from Romantic, social realistic, feminine to descriptive, reflective, humorous and occasional poems. Though he prefers to write in free verse, he tries his hand at structured verse, too in ‘Metrical forays’ by composing nine limericks, one sonnet, one ballad and one ballade.

His penchant for uncommon words begins with the subtitle ‘olio’ for miscellaneous collection and he continues with it pages after pages that makes familiar unfamiliar and unfamiliar familiar :

“Lo! Jesus sacrificed himself for the posterity,

Here the offspring is sacrificed for the parental sin.(4)

The ‘Olio’ is limited to ‘pleasure’ as he claims but it causes different *rasaanubhuti* at different levels like emotion of shock, sorrow, anger, pity and also pleasure and surprise. In “Woman’s World of Woes” woman’s plight in India is looked at from male’s perspective evoking pity and sympathy for her: “She dreams of good education/..../..../ Only to be under the Damocles’ sword/ Of salacious eyes and acid throwing bullies...

(5) Towards the end he presents woman as a personified image of 'every virtue' and in that background he questions the practice of worshipping the abstraction:

"Then why worship distant angels unseen
When we have the woman on this earthly scene?"

Only a man can raise this question not a woman however feminist she may be. "The dead mother blesses" written in a dialogic mode with an ironic tinge on the treatment of the old and practice of gifts of cow and calf to the priest. The dichotomy between mother's and son's perspectives is well eked out reaffirming the conventional values enshrined with mother.

In 'Facets of Nature' the smallest one speaks the loudest,

God turned
All hardness
Into hills
Harder-hearted man
Entered
And began blasting them."(Hills, 13)

Other poems are his tryst with the bounty of Nature in a descriptive mode. However, the poem "Oh, Emperor of Seasons!" acquires a different shade in summer's personified image and its interaction with different constituents of Nature in which human's 'Violation of nature's laws' is held responsible for natural disasters. Humans' ideal approach to hills is encapsulated in this line "...I don't pitch a post to fly my pennant pride./ I have only scaled for the delight of discovering..."(In the bosom of a breezy hill, 22)

His epiphanical experiences born out of his philosophical contemplation on life and his emotive engagement with Nature are enchanting taking us to the border line of fantasy and reality. "Vertigo" is his

creditable attempt at dramatic monologue and its 'epilogue' reminds me of Milton's doubt about the reward of his muse in *Lycidas*. The poet echoes:

Of what use is my Muse
Except to build castles in the air.

Milton's answer is certainly more epiphanical as it comes through the voice of Apollo.

In the section "Americana" he takes an opportunity to turn it into a memorable family album sharing his personal pictures and memories with his readers. They are memory de tour.

"Musing on Poesy" contains just two poems: one defines poetry and another needlessly defends his poetry. He writes in "Cradle of Poesy"

When flight of fancy
And a worthy wreath of words
Cohabit on a bed of aesthetics,
The labours of their union
Conceive the baby of poesy...(55)

In "That my poetry is too..." he defends his poetry against real or imagined charges and thereby justifies his poems as representation of nature:

Now, my dear erudite connoisseurs, compeers and critics!
My muse is only as good or bad as Nature herself. (58)

I am reminded of Ronald Barthes who says that a poet is merely a scripter. He exists to produce but not to explain the work.

After M.K.Naik very few poets have attempted humorous verse. Sarma's endeavour in this direction in "Tongue in Cheek" section points to the possibility of an independent collection of his tongue in cheek poetry. Let's have a taste of his sense of humour:

"I am too busy for gossip and sweet nothings!
How then, sir, are you so active on FB and the like

Round the clock, on every inch of every wall—with every wench!

Wow! What an incredible riddle you are!” (107)

Poems in the group “Relations and Equations” are unraveling of the layers of inner self and are able to strike a chord with the readers:

By synergy, we will achieve together surely
A lot more than each of us can separately” (62)

“A tryst with the terrorist” and “Toast to the Terrorist” stand out as a distinct poetic voice owing to their dramatic form and structure.

The poet U. Atreya Sarma in this collection ably demonstrates his craftsmanship in different poetic forms- structured and free verse, rhymed and unrhymed, and his ability to handle different poetic devices like, alliteration, assonance, simile, metaphor and syntactical parallelism. Now, it is for him to chart out his way in his favourite forte to leave an identifiable mark on the readers.

C L Khatri

□

Dr. Amarendra Kumar : Happenspace : Poems, Novelty & Co., Ashok Rajpath, Patna- 800004 CISBN : 978-81-926732-8-8) pp. 150, 2016, Price Rs. 150/-

Dr. Amarendra Kumar could not have chosen a more befitting title for his anthology. "Happenspace Poems" encapsulates and unfolds for us through a kaleidoscope of poems revolving around diverse themes of gender, environment, love, the dilemma of India men and women constrained by the deep-rooted social and cultural conventions and also expresses their desires as they wish to soar high in the sky. "Happenspace Poems" is a collection of 70 poems. To review such a phenomenal collection is a daunting task for the poet maps new terrain, each poem is an

individual expression, and to do justice to each one is next to impossible.

Dr. Amarendra Kumar is a celebrated bilingual poet, short story writer and critic. His publications include seven books of English verse, vize *The Real Episode* (1980), *Sound and Shell* (1986), *State Dilemma* (1988), *Song / Arti-Son* (1996), *Poetry Time Here- Poems : Perspective* (2010), *Voice Modulations : Poems* (2012), and *Tense Pattern :Poems* (2014), *Passionate Pilgrim* (2006), a collection of English short stories *Avartan* (2010), a collection of Hindi Poems and *Kachcha Bela* (1993), book of Hindi short stories.

The poet in Dr. Kumar communicates what he feels within an effortless mode of expression which appeals to the heart of the reader who begins to reflect with him without caring for the aesthetic pleasure. He is concerned chiefly with the rich contents which he articulates, rather shares with the reader. He has given priority to the feelings over the ornamented manner of expression.

Happenspace : Poems is the eighth poetry book of Dr. Kumar in which the poet imaginatively recaptures the convulsive happenspace of here and now, mostly in anguish, in the coils of a living experience of the cruel scheme of things and of the savagery inflicted on humanity by mad blind fanatics and extremists and flesh-hungry, bloodthirsty brutes.

In the very first poem "Happening" of this book the poet laments over the plight of the contemporary world which is on the brink of disaster :

"Time toil-torment-travails
on the brink of disaster—
defacing devastating eternity."

He further says,
"Writing poetry is to probe

a murder mystery....
So indeed ?" (p/3)

rise of crimes, rapes, murders and The poet is deeply concerned with the terrorist activities taking place all over the world. In the poem "World Market" he has made very apt satirical comments :

"Deadly power born blind
to go off on a deadlier intent
door open or not, pops in
pos up, soft targets
or even hard ones in mouth
munching, chomping...
He further says,

"Savage rape and murder
and mass massacre
to those performing, perpetrating !" (p 127)

Thematically the poet in Dr. Kumar is all in one because of his fellow feelings resulting in love for all. Though he does not care for the technique, it takes care of itself figures like simile, metaphore, alliteration etc. also appear here and there. "Time toil - torment - travails" (3), "Your whispers glow and sizzle / torn between death and eternity" (26), "teeth and claws digging in / time and space of fire / to feed the global warming" (81), Volconic nultrues masquerade / a powder keg mobile with coo-eyed doves" (85) "Bike monster's shot a lowless hole / in the body clock of life and time" (95), "Sunway, moonway, subway / highways hung high, laid law" (106) "when scudding shuddering sails in air" (112), "Crossmind a cross to carry/ staggering, stumbling" (113) are some of the instances that prove that his love for figures is not less than his love for feelings.

In the poem "Coming to Call" Dr. Kumar has exhibited his passionate desire through these lines :

"Come, I'll tell you a story
if you lend me your tongue
to quell queries with merry ferry boats
flying to a rocky riverbank
no endless end, nor any beguiling be ginning...
(p/115+116)

Dr. Amarendra Kumar's "*Happenspace : Poems*" has the potential enough to stir the feelings in the heart of the reader who can not help himself thinking the power of love in binding the people of the world into one. Each line of this anothology is pregnant with meaning. Beauty lies in its simplicity and frankness. Certainly, this poetic collection will be a helping guide to the reader in awakaning the human feelings and realizing the importance of his culture, with a striking cover the book feels good to hold in hand and is a delight to read.

Dr. Kumar Chandradeep

□

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Chief Editor

C. L. Khatri

Patna

Editor

Dr. Rajendraprasad Y. Shinde

Associate Professor & Head,

Dept. of English

Kisan Veer Mahavidyalaya,

WAI, Dist.- Satara- 412803

Mob. : 9370691812

LL. 02167-223908

email : rajendraprasad.shinde@gmail.com