



Mahasweta Devi's Mother of 1084 : Saga of predicament of middle class women in Indian society

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ABSTRACT

Mahasweta Devi is one of the prominent women writers of India. Mother of 1084 is the most popular fiction of Mahasweta Devi even cinematized. The book is a poignant satire on the suffering of the middle class woman in the male dominated society and a saga of a brave woman who fights along for the injustice done to her. In most of her writings has tried to bring the condition of suppressed in to light and became 'Voice of the voiceless'. The present book depicts the struggle of woman against family, society, and the system for identity, space, independence in the male dominated social texture. It throws light on the process of role assigned to women in the family. It even criticizes the system of straightjacketed psyche of women fixed in the frame of different roles and responsibilities assigned to them in the name of duties. Devi writes with a purpose and in the present work, she has successfully related the social movement to the emotions of her protagonist. She strongly believes that every writer has a social duty to perform.

KEYWORDS

Predicament of Women, Identity, Personal space, Assigning of Roles.

INTRODUCTION:

Mahasweta Devi is the foremost women writer of modern Indian writings. She was born in 1926 in the city of Dhaka in East Bengal (at present in Bangladesh) with strong literary background. She did B.A. (Hons) English in Vishva Bharti University in Shantiniketan and M.A. in English at Calcutta University. Besides being a literary writer, Devi also worked for the improvement of down troddens (i.e. Santhals, Lodhas, Shabars, and Mundas). She developed topics related to the lives of such exploited class of society. She selected the path of an activist and spent many years in fighting for the rights of tribals. In the time-span of nearly last forty years, she contributed twenty collections of short stories in many literary magazines. The big Red Movement of Naxalbari of late 60s and early 70s, mostly known as Naxalbari Movement, also influenced her. In Mother of 1084, she has referred to this issue and has woven entire plot around it. The height of excellence she achieved can be measured by the long list of awards she received in her career. The major ones are Amrit Bazar (1967), Sahitya Academy (1979), Jnanpith (1996), Ramon Magsaysay (1997), Padmashri Award (1986), and Desi Kottama (1999). They stand as a testimony of her activist spirit and literary genius.

Place, Identity, and Independence:

Mahasweta Devi is a sensationalist women writer. She has portrayed the protagonist of the book Sujata with the utmost delicacy. Apparently, there is singular plot that depicts the story of a mother and a wife who all of a sudden comes to know about the death of her son Brati in police encounter for his involvement in the rebels of Naxalbari movement. This makes her curious for what made her son a rebel. Surprisingly during her investigation, she comes to know about the cause that makes her revolt against the same system. Devi has intentionally projected the protagonist as a covert character whose psychological introspection becomes the line of plot in the book. The very first thing that attracts the attention is the system of assigning roles in the family and society. How she performs her duties in the family as a wife, mother, and caretaker of the house. These roles in the society are strictly monitored. They become the standards of defining their morality or immorality. This age-old process of considering woman of the house as secondary in the place is depicted beautifully in the book. This issue interrelate the question of place of woman in the family. Mother of 1084 is a saga of Sujata's search for place of her own in the family. In her search, she realizes that

she even lacks the identity of her own. Her individual identity relies on the patriarch of the family. The authoritative approach of her husband suppresses her individual identity. In Sujata's case, her family becomes her victimizer. She is denied the rightful place in the family. The book is a saga of struggle of Sujata for finding the rightful place and personal identity. One more issue in the book is the denial of economic independence. Sujata's going to job is severely criticized by her husband and her mother in law.

Failure of the Marriage System:

Devi has satirized the marriage system as it becomes medium of exploitation by the patriarch of the family. It is recommended in the name of safety, as single woman is not safe in the society. They are often accused of being immoral and are exploited. Sujata marries with the hope of better life, but her marriage smother her. Instead of love, compassion, companionship, and equality their relation develops in to master and slave. Her husband controls her every move. Devi satirizes that in Indian male dominated society women are used as commodity. They are often exploited on sexual grounds in the family, workplace, and in the society. Dibyanath's illicit relationship with his secretary highlights the issue of sexual exploitation of woman at work place. The best of Devi's expression in describing the relation of Dibyanath and Sujata saying, 'he used her as a doormat'. Devi has emphasized the failure of marriage system.

Futility of Education System:

Devi has shown the futility of education in the improvement of the condition of women. The high conceptions of education that provide mental as well economic stability, own identity, independent thinking, etc. fail in the book. These conceptions are reduced merely to the additional qualification. Besides that, it even doubles their burden as educated women are expected to earn along with the household work. They are forced to shoulder the responsibilities of two equally burdensome spheres.

Escape from Reality:

Surprisingly Devi has personified the character of Sujata as an escapist. In the book, we often find her going to the room of Brati, as it reminded her of the good old memories that she had with Brati. Even her continuation of job represents her escape from the adverse surrounding at home. This escape symbolizes the helplessness of women in the issues.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, Mahasweta Devi has mainly focused on the process of roles assigned to women in the male dominated society. She has tried to discuss the question of individual space and socio-economic independence of women. She has beautifully narrated how they are deprived of their rights and are treated as secondary citizens. She has connotatively satirized the failure of marriage and education. Through this she has even pointed out the issue of sexual exploitation and their use as commodity in the Indian society. The book is an excellent depiction of woman's struggle in violation of patriarchal norms and its subsequent effects.

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