

Tenacious Tribulations in Mahasweta's *Mother Of 1084 and Bayen*

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Abstract

Drama is the oldest and the highly celebrated literary genre. Drama originated during the age of classical Greek. Later, it was adopted by the university wits, nurtured by the Elizabethan dramatists. The versatile literary genre has undergone rapid and magnificent changes in its technique, narration, presentation, style and form without prejudice to its effects on the readers as well as the audience. Drama is the core of human emotions where a dramatist pens the plot with utmost care and feelings that have to be performed on the stage and witnessed by the audience. A play communicates in silence and sounds through the characters and the situations it presents. This paper entitled Tenacious Tribulations in Mahasweta's *MOTHER OF 1084* and *BAYEN* aims at portraying the Plight of women in the plays of Devi.

Keywords: patriarchal, subjugation, degenerated, subalternity

The rise of the modern Indian drama began with the British Empire consolidating its power in India. The Indian drama has its roots in religious faiths and religious performance. The act of writing for a woman is an opportunity to break her silence of ages because of a number of reasons. Drama of late has emerged as a strong medium for highlighting women's issues and an exclusive forum where women audiences could relate and connect the lives of women and share their perspective with the world. Women have found drama as a means of expression of their innermost feelings and exposing of personality. Women dramatists tried to enrich the field of Indian drama by projecting the inner world of feminine psyche in the theatre. Women playwrights focus the issues of violence, physical, mental and several other aspects of it. They have adopted the genre as a more practical means to present serious familial, social, cultural and political issues, the horrible crimes and practices of the society in a satirical manner.

Mahasweta Devi was born in 1926 in Dhaka to literary parents. Devi grew up at the moment when the national movement and freedom struggle were at their highest. Devi is motivated by the sense of history. She is a social activist. Devi is the recipient of Sahitya Academi (1979) and Jnanapith (1996) awards, a Padmasree for her active work among

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dispossessed tribal communities. Devi's five plays - *Mother of 1084*, *Aajr*, *Urvashi o'Johnny*, *Bayen and Water* are translated and brought out in the form of anthology.

Devi's *Mother of 1084* exposes the subjugation of women. It crosses the boundaries of classified feminism. It deals with a mother who is a victim of the constraints of the male-dominated society. Sujata, the protagonist, is a misfit in her own family. Though she is well aware of the corrupt degenerated values represented by her husband Dibynath, she fails to disconnect herself with them and leads a compromising life. She loves her younger son, Brati, who is a man of clear ideas, but she does not try to know about his activities. Brati takes to revolutionary activities. He never let his mother know of his true self- although he thinks high of her as he is engaged in the programme of liberating the people from the clutches of the exploitative system. Brati is brutally killed. Ironically, Sujata comes to learn about his sacrifice only two years after his death. The search for her son leads to the realization of her own being as mother- woman and human being.

Sujata is in conflict with the world around her. She is compelled to adapt to the situation around her and also to accept the social norms and traditions. She is not bold enough to bring a change. As a result, she pays no heed to Brati's revolt the age-old several values. In this play, Brati actually deals with the universalizing human experience as an experience which drove many a mother and a son to martyrdom. Agitated Sujata says vehemently:

SUJATA: (addressing the audience) why don't you speak? Speak, for heaven's sake, speak, speak, speak! How long will you endure it in silence? Where is the place where is no killer, no bullets, no prison-, no vans? (F.P, 35)

In fact, with Sujata, Devi brings out the darker aspects of life where the persecution of the innocent continues unabated. Sujata feels suffocated under the weight of stifling values enjoyed on her by patriarchal society. Yet, she never ventures to disentangle herself from them. She is aware of her degenerated husband's womanizing and corrupt practices, but she says nothing against him. She bears calmly all her humiliations. It is only with Nandhini, Sujata comes to terms with her consciousness. Nandhini strikes her mind, and slowly she realizes that the questions asked by Nandhini offer a severe probe into the social, political and cultural conditions of the society. Commenting on the character of Sujata, A. Ramadevi in "Awakening of an Apolitical Mother; Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*" says:

Though the character of Sujata, Mahasweta Devi seeks to bring to light the darker areas of life where persecution of the innocent continues unabated.

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She is one of those victims where kith and kin had been done away with as a result of confrontation with the people in power. Sujata is a middle class woman, a sensitive wife and a loving mother but a strange in her own household that has reduced her to an insignificant log” (139-40)

Bayen, Devi’s next play is a moving story of a sensitive mother who like Sujata, is placed against the powerful patriarchal institution. Chandidasi, the central character is a grave digger. Her job is to bury the dead children and protect them from Jacks at night. As long as she remains unmarried and is not blessed with a child, she goes on with her work without any complaint. She is fed up with her routine job. Having found an image of her baby son in the dead children she buries. Chandi pleads with her husband Malindar, to release her from the constraints thrust on her by the feudal society, by taking her to a town where nobody knows about them.

Malindar pays no heed to her complaints. Rather, he asks her to continue with her job, as it is a symbol of social status. However, Chandi does her work not for the material pleasures but for an obligation, she has towards her ancestors. Chandi, in spite of herself, is involved in the work of guarding the graves at night. The people led by Gourdas, brand her as a witch and condemn her to live away from her son and family. Though she is reduced to the animal status by the society, she is not devoid of human passion. In fact, the separation from her son and society has led to the realization of her being as a mother and a human being. When Gourdas plan to stop and loot the train by spreading bamboo sticks on the railways, Chandi runs to the spot and dies in an attempt to alert the accident. The defiance of age-old feudal values takes concrete shape as her son- Bhagirath comes forward to acknowledge the dead as his mother. The horror of the plight of subaltern woman is present the play *Bayen*.

The world Chandidasi belongs to is a far cry from that of Sujata of **Mother**, unlike Sujata, she comes to domes, who have been hailed as ‘Harijans’. Chandidasi like Sujata is an affectionate mother and a sensitive wife. It is revealed by Devi during the interrogation between Bhagirath and Malindar over Chandidasi who had become a bayen now:

MALINDAR: she had everything – when she was
your mother, my wife, I gave her striped saris
towear,andsilver-nickelled jewellery...
.you've heard of Harishchandra who gave
him shelter when he lost his kingdom
and became a beggar? (F.P -87)

In *Bayan*, Malindar, as a product of patriarchal, denies his own wife and brands her a witch when the crowd accuses of her evil influence. She rests her confidence only on him. She thinks that her husband could save her from the disgrace. The mutual love between mother and son is curtailed. As a mother, Chandidasi yearns to show her affection on her son but at the same time she fears that her influence will spoil the life of the child. The son is also trained to avoid his mother.. The place where she lives is isolated and her only company is the dog ,Jhumra. Chandidasi has no voice of her own, she voices to her dog. Bayen appeared as a short story in 1971- before it was dramatized.

Devi's dramatic writing largely deals with subaltern characters, and her plays have been performed in rural and tribal areas. Devi examines the issues of subalternity that have otherwise been overlooked or misinterpreted. In particular, while many scholars fail to acknowledge the unique way that subalternity affects women. Devi's writing locates specifically female experiences within discourse of subalternity. Devi's women character includes wives, sisters and daughters of bonded laborers. Devi's use of drama and performance convey the oppression faced by subaltern women have clearly paved the way for the translation of the discourses of subaltern studies to film. As the issues in gendered subalternity that her writing explores has clearly been replicated in recent Indian cinema.

Indian women playwrights play a prolonged saga of violence and murderous frenzy where death image proliferate. Most of their plays revolve around the terms of love, sex and violence they portray the women subordinating. And male chauvinism in a male- oriented society. Women one not consulted in decision making and are often forced to remain indoors and are subjected to domestic violence and abuse, and physical and psychological oppression. Women crave for economic independence, self -reliance and to combat against discrimination, exploitation and victimization in the patriarchal Indian society. They portray women as slaves and victim within the institute called marriage. Devi portrays the lower – caste women as an ostracized community in orthodox Hindu Varna hierarchy.

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