

Crumbled Voices of Marginalized Women in Mahasweta Devi's *Giribala*

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Abstract

This paper examines Mahasweta Devi's short-story *Giribala* in order to demonstrate the paradoxical condition and representation of women in society as well as their crumbled voices. It also looks at their endurance and resistance. Women's positions in society, specifically those of marginalized ones positions are very much obsessed with the sense of negligence and docility. Marginalized women, the tribe or the poor women and the outcast or the rebellious women, do not acquire any respectable position and identity in society. Their agonies have long been neglected, and are not even regarded as erroneous but the usual happenings of day-to-day life. Every woman does not belong to the upper class or challenge the fate of misery or not, every single woman has the same tragedy to sustain but most of them have resemblances. They have similar experiences, impervious pronunciation and different situations. Devi's stories address this unspoken reality and truth of women's pain and their power of enduring and resistance.

Keywords: Mahasweta Devi, *Giribala*, Marginalized, Identity, Women, Resistance, Negligence, Endurance, Crumbled Voices

Mahasweta Devi and Marginalized Women

From British imperialism to post-independent India, social activist and Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi has perceived the years of political twists and changes that have ended up in India's crucial vicinity in the global arena. Inspiring young and old with her strong attitude in the support of the tribes of India, she is a resolute supporter for the socio-economic protection, security, and political welfare of tribes. Devi, as a political anthropologist for her profound ethnographic insight, takes up an ethnographic realism in her writing and a social conscience that have inspired all stages of her prolific writing career.

The experiences of marginalized women are destructive and have multiple shades of evolution and understanding. The marginalized women are those who are living in the tangential line of living in terms of their gender discrimination, class differences and caste position, especially as home-grown woman. These types of women are normally are unnoticed in the civil society. Their pains have long been ignored and are not considered as sinful but the usual occurrences of day-to-day life. Furthermore, these women do not have any stand in regard of their authority on their own body and day-to-day life of living. This body authority is subjected to her dominating male partner. Even, the act of pain of the female body is regarded as the part of the usual thing in case of marginalized women.

In this perspective, Devi's novels elucidate the microscopic details of these women living, suffering and enduring suffering. Her writings instruct us this hidden truth of women's pain and agony and their power of enduring and resistance. In her fiction, readers get the linear natured story

which is negligent in serious literature. Her novels extend a bunch of female's figurative positions in society as well as their materialistic utilisation of the body for the economic and social advantages. Furthermore, her fiction presents the subverted gender role and consequences of this subversion. It also captures the striking layers of domination and resistance. Her short-stories stand out as a powerful means that subverts the authority of upper caste in tribal society, specifically marginalized women's oppression by the society. She opts for the tribal women who in several ways are submerged by economy and society.

Giribala

Devi's most famous short-story, *Giribala*, (1982) is a tale that deals with the predicament of an innocent poor village woman whose two pretty daughters are sold into the flesh trade by their father to materialize his dream of constructing a house. *Giribala*, a humble girl of Talsana village in West Bengal is married to Aullchand, after bargaining a due bride-price. Aullchand, the ganja-fiend has no land or property of his own but greedily longed to have his own house. *Giribala*'s parents cannot find the hidden agenda about Aullchand's crooked mind. *Giribala* gives birth successively to four girl children; Belarani, Paribala, Rajiv and Maruni. Mohan, a procurer, has foretold that Aullchand would get only male baby after the fourth girl. But *Giribala* decides to have family planning herself. This act of her infuriates her husband. He beats her severely and claimed that she has to pay penalty for her failure to give birth to a male issue. Being preoccupied with male baby, Aullchand demanded the right to sell off all the four daughters as an act of compensation for not giving birth to the male child.

In connivance with the bohemian vagrant, Aullchand sells his first two daughters one after another for a few crisp hundred-rupee notes. It is a part of common extensive extortion, the girl-trafficking trade.

Despondent *Giribala*

The despondent *Giribala* raised a hue and cry and shouts for help in vain. None could do anything as the father himself got his daughters sold in the attire of marriage. The helpless people could only say, "A girl is by fate discarded, lost if she is dead, lost if she is wed. And your fate, no different" (77). Eventually to the wonderment of every one *Giribala* migrates to the town leaving her husband behind, to work as a maid-servant and to rise up her remaining children. Everyone condemned this act of *Giribala*. They start to behave as if they are convinced that it is not Aullchand but *Giribala* who is at fault. Thus, Devi takes our society to charge for exercising gender discrimination and thereby supporting the trade of girl-trafficking by the hustlers. Though delayed, the empowerment of *Giribala*, eventually, extents an optimistic end to the story.

Conflict with Traditional Ethics

Giribala manifests the traditional ethics of giving the money for the bride's hand as in the story; it is "even now ... Custom to pay for the bride's hand in marriage" (61). *Giribala* is only fourteen years old when her father handovers her in marriage to Aullchand who purports to be well-employed but, later turns out that Aullchand is a fraudulent. Not only a cheat but also an irresolute creature that never bother about selling-off his own daughters for building a house and get drunk. Yet, his sugary behaviour satisfied *Giribala*'s parents and so thus "at the age of 14, *Giri* goes to keep house for her husband" (64). There she witnesses the true picture of her husband's behaviour. She takes the household work at Babu's place and works hard as domestic support. She realises that leaving her husband is not a right choice as "a girl's by fate discarded, lost if she's dead, lost if she's wed" (64). Then, *Giribala* gives birth to two girls and a boy within five years. A third daughter was born a few years later. When her first daughter Bela is ten-years old, *Giribala* starts thinking about

arranging her marriage, but the drug-addict Aullchand sells Bela and their second daughter Pari for prostitution. After this, Giribala leaves with her youngest daughter Maruni in her arms; grasps the hand of her son Rajiv. Yet, her community chides Giribala for this gutsy step,

The news amazes everyone, sets their heads shaking in disapproval. What happened to Bela and Pari is common practice these days. But why leave your husband and go away? What kind of woman is that? Everyone is convinced that it's not Aullchand but Giribala who's at fault. An indescribable relief fills them, all of them, when they reach this conclusion. (84)

Portraying Growing Resistance of Women

Giribala presents the resistance of women, whether she is mother or daughter or wife or woman. Giribala leaves her husband with her only son and last daughter because other people never think about her daughter anymore. Nobody will step forward to save her daughter as “nobody willing to give much thought to a girl-child. She, too, should not worry. She, too, is female” (2011, 73). Still, Giribala's tale points out the materialize use of the female body in order to get object. Aullchand's daughters are not as priceless to him as his dream of building a house. His perception reflects the traditional view about women. His actions show a different range of exploiting women's body. By selling them, Aullchand takes up an idea that these women do not have any voice, any identity. These women are mass as products as they can be sold freely.

Furthermore, there is an incident where Giribala's husband Aullchand accuses her for family planning. The complaints come towards Giribala because for Aullchand, “the more daughters you produce, the more money you acquire” (83) and that proposes that Giribala does not have any claim on her own body. Her reproductive body means a money resource for her husband and by exploiting the body; he can earn more money to construct a house. On the other hand, Giribala resists and leaves her husband. She earns a certain space within non-identical society as her own. She denies the social barriers and even ignores the criticism of society because she feels that she has to do that. She takes bold decision to save her only left a daughter and a son. She gets an authoritative sense and power to lead her own life. She is the deciding authority of her own life.

Women's Bodies

In *Giribala*, one can see how women's reproductive bodies become a political arena of political resistance and social activism against a licensed patriarchal power structure that interminably subjugates the women's lives for centuries of injustice and gendered brutality and impoverishment. Devi's ethnographic communiqué of the sale of young girls into prostitution announces to a rooted history of gendered violence aimed at young juvenile girls.

In this short-story, Devi's protagonist Giribala is an adolescent girl when she is married off to the rude Aulchand and brainwashed into the patriarchal dictum: “A daughter born. To husband or death. She's already gone” (87). In this property trade, Giribala's father dowries Aulchand “eighty-rupees and a heifer before he married her,” (87) Giribala is directed into the patriarchal deal for exchange. After her fourth daughter Maruni's birth “she asked the doctor at the hospital, where she went for this birth, to sterilize her” (76). Her request for family planning raises questions of reproductive control and arouses the rage of her husband. When Aulchand urges her about it, Giribala opts to preclude her reproductive system because “having a daughter only means having to raise a slave for others” (276). The sexual commodification of young girls becomes a sheer materialisation when Auchland agrees to marry off his twelve-year old daughter for just four hundred rupees, while Giribala is away visiting her parents. Later, Giribala realizes, “there were five girls like

Bela taken there to be married to five unknown blokes. The addresses they left are false. This kind of business is on the rise” (81). Here, one can witness the radical inner workings of a fraudulent gendered economic system - the selling of young girls for survival. It is a system that has been bolstered by hegemonic inculcation in order to maintain its epistemic validity and the acceptance of the status quo by the broader community.

Giribala’s Bela is another victim of a fraudulent trading of “procuring girls on the pretext of marriage” (81). Devi notes that the police do little to save the young girls and their mothers in these critical situations. Instead, they indict it on the father and the reality that “Poor Bela had this written on her forehead,” she is a girl after all (81). Giribala’s first reaction is to hit her head against a patriarchal ceiling that puts men as owners and women’s as repressed manufacturers. It is a deciding logic that endures gendered subjugation, as “A daughter, until she is married, is her father’s property. It’s useless for a mother to think she has any say” (81). Here, we co-witness how girls have become disaffected commodities to be bargained, bought, and sold as commodities of sexual labour.

It is not until Giribala has been misled into marrying her almost ten-year old daughter, Pori, off into what she felt at the time is a way to save her from the same fate of her first daughter Bela that Giribala begins to find another way out of her difficult situation. Badly, the mother has been swept away by the dream to marry her daughters. Giribala abandons her husband to protect her only son and daughter. She ignores the society and endures her pain as her power of surviving.

Voice for the Voiceless Marginalized Women

Devi’s short-stories are raising a voice for these voiceless marginalized women. Her short-stories are portraying the exploitation of female body as well as forming a resistance factor of female body. After examining *Giribala*, it is concluded that these marginalized women do exercise a power within a restricted system. This power is subverted and in some case is distorted like her body and identity. This power has attained through a long-term suffering by oppressing her voice and sacrifice which is by amputating of female body. Yet, they acquire a voice in numerous forms but ultimate aim is to be heard which is done by Devi, admirably. Thus, Devi’s short-stories are reflecting the repressive power of resistance.

Thus Devi, the master storyteller, attacks the social evils that prevail in the society and pummels all those who are liable for them. She speaks about the failure of our system to bring justice to the marginalized people of our society. It is evident that the number and variety of her short-stories enable us to see the huge web of Indian social life with all its differences and complexities.

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