

# Predicament of Women in the Select Works of Mahasweta Devi

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**Abstract**—The image of women in literature differs from each writer's perspective. Writing has seen the parts of women developing through ages. Education was entirely constrained and the greater parts of those authors were male. Anyway the commitment of women to oral fables can't be underestimated in people melodies, stories, verse, and writing by and large. This paper deals with the predicament of subaltern women in the play *Bayen* and the short story *Draupadi* by Mahasweta Devi. Mahasweta Devi's writings are powerful stories about tribal life. The stories are always located in a particular area that is a geographic reality like Tohar, Palami or Lohardaga. *Bayen* addresses issues of gender inequality and societal exclusion fuelled by illiteracy. In *Bayen*, Chandidasi the protagonist, is termed as *Bayen* meaning witch because of her profession which she takes up after her father's death. She undergoes untold sufferings and still endures it. Only after her sacrificial death she is considered as a human being. In *Draupadi*, the protagonist *Dopdi Mejhen*, a tribal rebel, is raped by the authorities of the state. She deflates the egotism and manhood of her perpetrators by simply refusing to accept the semiotics of her multiple rape. She at last makes the authority fear for his life by her daring confrontation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mahasweta Devi is a unique literary activist who is born to a poet father and a social worker cum writer mother. She has written over hundred and seventy books of which many are not published. From British Colonialism to post autonomy India, Bengali author and social promoter Mahasweta Devi has seen many years of political change that have finished in India's significant nearness on the worldwide stage. Moving youthful and old with her solid position in help of India's inborn populaces, Devi has been an energetic promoter for the financial assurance, security, and political prosperity of the Adivasis, otherwise called the Scheduled Tribes. Devi's writings are the harsh realities of the exploitation and oppression of the marginalized by the upper class. Moreover her works mostly hover around the suffering of the underprivileged women. She views from the perspective of the victims of her characters. No other writer can portray the sufferings of the women like she does. She is well known for her work *Draupadi* and the mother of 1084. Devi lived with different tribes, observed their method of cooking and

gathered research for her writings. She has been an inspiring figure of many women writers. She is such a brilliant writer that one can picturise the events through her narration.

## 2. CHANDIDASI, THE BAYEN

The play *Bayen* was dramatized during 1976-77, while it was published earlier as a short story entitled *Witch* in 1971. This play brings out the superstition and ignorance prevalent among the people, especially the rural set up. Already subjugated by the upper class, this kind of oppression serves to be even more traumatic for the women. So the underprivileged women faces the suppression twice that of the downtrodden men folk.

As Gita Arvamudan says, "As compared to men, women become the softest targets for the great upholders of traditional values." (The Hindu, 1993, 10) mostly it is woman who are exploited and tortured in the name of tradition. Moreover, they are forced to lose their identity. Husbands who ought to stand by the wives in a hard situation forsake them. In *Bayen*, the protagonist Chandidasi Gangadasi, comes from the family of Doms. She is assigned an ancestral obligation to bury the dead children and guard the graves during night. She is the descendant of the amazing Kalu Dom who has been endowed to care for all the cremation grounds of the world. When ruler Harishchandra had lost his domain and fell on hopeless days, it was Kalu Dom who gave him nourishment and safe house. Harishchandra after retaining his kingdom gave gifts for all who never cared him when he lost his kingdom. Malindar, Chandi's husband remembers how Kalu Dom was rewarded:

MALINDAR. ... (He comes to the centre of the stage, turns his back to the audience, to the audience, raises his face and shouts.) What have you for us? For my community? A rich, somber voice makes a formal announcement.

VOICE. All the cremation grounds of the world are yours...yours,yours,yours...

MALINDAR... (smiles, as he explains to his son). Yes that's how it happened, Bhagirath. Then Kalu Dom danced like

that.(he raises his arms, and dances, screaming continuously.) The Brahmins, the sadhus, the sanyasis get cattle, us, for us, for us only. (2008,102-103)

It is evident that however a lower caste man helps someone there will be no upliftment for him. He is forced to remain in his position itself. Chandidasi, the protagonist is ostracized from the society since she is working in the burial ground and lactating. She is termed as a "Bayen" after several village children die of disease. She is separated from her husband and her son when she is accused of being a bayen. The society thinks that Chandidasi breastfeeds dead children and she also has the ability to curse others. So she is made to live in a small hut in the graveyard completely away from the village. When she comes to the village to get food she has certain restrictions. She has to make sound while she is coming and she should not look any one in their eyes.

Malindar, Chandidasi's husband works in the morgue. Chandidasi is an authorized gravedigger. She has acquired this calling from her great-grandparents. She is a kind lady. She covers the tyke with most extreme care. Anyway as time goes by she is tired of her calling. She finds in the carcasses of kids the picture of her own suckling son whom she needs to leave to monitor the cemetery around evening time. She feels distressed. She desperately wants to leave the profession. Chandidasi who is the only child of her parents is forced to take up job of their family lineage. We don't read anywhere in the play that when Chandidasi's forefathers were doing this job they were shunned away by the society. But when a woman does the job she is termed as a Bayen. She finds it very hard to be away from her child. She undergoes untold humiliation as a woman. She has to stay alone in the graveyard during the night time. Bhagirath, her son comes to know that his mother is a bayen. Even her child doesn't know her. Malindar explains Bhagirath explains that the Bayen is his mother:

BHAGIRATH. Father, you... you spoke to the Bayen?

MALINDAR. (smiling mysteriously). So what, son?

BHAGIRATH. Isn't the living man who speaks to the bayen doomed to die? My second mother tells me, Bhagirath, come back straight from school and run whenever you hear the canister clanging. Otherwise she'll suck your life blood. And you spoke to her? Won't she kill you off?

MALINDAR. No dear, she won't kill me (He strokes Bhagirath's head, lovingly, slowly) She's a Bayen now, but ... but, Bhagirath ... she's your mother.

BHAGIRATH. My mother? The Bayen's my mother? What sort of a mother? (2008,101-102)

Though Malindar loves her, he succumbs to the ideology of the society. He has remarried and is happily leading his marital life, while Chandidasi suffers all alone. She lacks physical and moral support from her husband. Her husband takes the side of his family when everyone accused her for the

death of Tukni. Tukni is the niece of Malindar and he dies of small pox. Malindar by beating drums announces that his wife has become a bayen. Though Malindar had a happy life earlier with his wife Chandidasi, he forsakes her when she needs him the most. The story ends as Chandidasi saving a train from robbers and eventually losing her life in the process.

### 3. DOPDI - THE OBJECT OF SEARCH

If Chandidasi suffers in this manner, Dopdi Mejen is suppressed in another manner. Dopdi Mejen is the protagonist of the short story Draupadi. Draupadi and her better half Dulna are on the 'most needed' rundown in West Bengal. They kill affluent proprietors to assert wells and tube-wells which are their fundamental wellsprings of water in the town. They battle for their entitlement to fundamental methods for sustenance. Dulna is in the end gunned around policemen; anyway Draupadi figures out how to escape and starts to work helping criminals who have killed degenerate property-proprietors and landowners, escape. She thoughtfully misdirects the cops who are on her trail, with the goal that the criminals' campground remains a mystery. In any case, she is at long last gotten and kept in police care. This is the place the story really starts.

Throughout a couple of days, Draupadi is more than once assaulted and tormented by various cops who express that their requests to "make her" to have originated from their Bade Sahib, officer Senanayak, responsible for her case. The following day, the policemen take her back to the tent and advise her to dress herself, since she has to meet Senanayak. As the protect pushes a basin of water forward, for her to wash herself, she chuckles, tosses the dilute and tears the bit of material on her body. She continues to leave her tent, towards Senanayak, bare and with her head held high. Senanayak is shocked rapidly turns away his eyes from her body. She goes right upto him, hands on her hips and says "the object of your search, Dopdi Mehjen. You asked them to make me. Don't you want to see how they made me?" When Senanayak asks where her garments are, she answers, that garments were futile on the grounds that once she was stripped, she couldn't be dressed once more. She spits on Senanayak with appall and says "How can you clothe me? Are you a man? There isn't a man here, that I should be ashamed". She pushes Senanayak with her uncovered breasts and out of the blue, he is apprehensive.

### 4. PREDICAMENT OF WOMEN

Both Chandidasi and Dopdi suffer in different manner. Chandidasi is traumatized as a bayen and Dopdi by getting raped several times. Chandidasi is oppressed by the society which ought to be grateful to her for performing a decent burial to their dead children. She has several restrictions like she should live in isolation, she should announce her entry amidst a crowd, she should not look any one in their eyes etc. But she in return saves the society from robbers, which is not

worth actually. She shows her selflessness. Dopdi fights for the rights of her community which is suppressed by the upper class. She in no way reveals the hideout of her people, even at the point of being raped continuously. Dopdi is inhumanly raped continuously, her breasts bitten and her nipples torn. She is “made” brutally by the policemen. She is not ashamed to stand before a man undressed, since she does not consider him a man. She at last is able to shake the great officer Senanayak, who ordered to “make her”. He is scared to stand before his unarmed target for the first time. When a woman rebels for her rights this is how she is “made” by the society.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Mahasweta Devi is one writer who has always voiced the oppression of the subaltern. Women in Indian society are certainly in a much tougher situation as not only do they have to battle social prejudices and imaging but also have to counter such images by participating more proactively in the struggles of society. Feminism for such women is certainly very different from the western ideals of feminism. One of the themes in which this becomes all the more apparent is in Mahasweta’s discussion on motherhood. Mahasweta devi’s women character endure in the zone of political, financial and social persecution, which thus is reflected in their association with their children. As part of the network in which they live, the ladies are in relation of persistent subservience. And in the event that they happen to have a place with the lower positions this subservience is duplicated many occasions over.

Women, potentially the most mistreated network in the history, swung without hesitation quickly after they began taking in outside. Today they are the most particular network, as well as devoted to testing the conventional custom.

All through Mahasweta Devi’s fiction, women’s enslavement is depicted as connection to the abuses of rank and class. Since Mahasweta Devi established her accounts and plots on occasions she saw or read about, her written work consolidates inborn dialects and tongues, people stories and oral chronicles. She lifted these accounts with her creative energy, utilizing different sorts and styles. Her composition is brutal and melodious, her tone amusing, mocking.

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