

# A Study on Gendered Subalterns in Mahasweta Devi's Select Short Stories

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**Abstract—** Literature is a genre through which writers since the inception of civilization have empathically highlighted the current issues of the day. The Novelist and writers since the time immemorial have been instrumental in mirroring the plight of subordinated and exploited classes. Mahasweta Devi perfectly employs in pointing out the ideas of subaltern. The aim of this study is to look at their critical spaces through Mahasweta Devi's narrative world which is densely populated with women folk of disposed Adivasi community. Through this research, an attempt is made to understand the problems and struggles of the tribal women in particular.

**Index Terms:** Subaltern, Tribal, women, enslavement, exploitation, marginalized.

## DISCUSSIONS

The term subaltern was first introduced by Italian Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci. The term is used to generally denote the people who are marginalized or who belong to oppressed class. The research paper focuses on the representation of tribal women in *Imaginary Maps* by Mahasweta Devi. She clearly makes a move in the general perspective about subaltern women by representing them as decisive and assertive women. The select short stories such as *The Hunt*, *Douloti the Bountiful* are eye openers as they present tribal women's non-conformity to stereotypical roles. In *Imaginary Maps* Mahasweta Devi reveals that the bequest of brutality in the lives of tribal women as a victim of sexual oppression and economic exploitation. India's indigenous tribes are located in the lowest positions in the strictly bound caste society. According to Mahasweta Devi the struggles of tribal people have been given deficient acknowledgement. She provides the representation of the subaltern women within the socio political domain of the nation. She is one among those writers

who has conveyed the predicament of the most downtrodden and marginalized parts of Indian society.

Mahasweta Devi examines the hardcore bias of race, class, gender and brings the spirit of equality among them. The tribal world finds space and voice in her works, especially the inhabitants of the Palamau district of Bihar which she considers as the "Mirror of India". Mahasweta Devi said, "My India still lives behind a curtain of darkness, a curtain that separates the main stream society from the 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 (Mahasweta Devi, Ramon Magsaysay award acceptance speech, 1997). An effective symbol of subaltern resistance is Mary Oraon a character from the short story *The Hunt*. Mary oraon is fundamentally a cross women. *The Hunt* maps the happenings of tribal lives of oraon tribal women in post independent times, and which is also a social representation of the contemporary evolution of gender roles and the relationship that the tribal women sustain in their everyday life. *The Hunt* shows the misconduct of tribal women by the colonizers. Oraon is the product of Bikhni's tribal women raped by a white man who came to India after decolonization to sell his property. Mary is vicious, pleased and delightful woman, but she has to work like a thrall for her family. Her response to Tehsildar's carnal approach goes beyond her forbearance as she firmly believes that "among the tribal's insulting or raping women is the greatest crime. Rape is uncommon to them; women have a place of honour in tribal society" (*Imaginary Maps* xi). Tehsildar Singh has a lot of money, and a lot of men. A city bastard. He can destroy Jalim by setting up a larceny case against him (12-13).

When Tehsildar Singh starts to molest her; she kills him to put an end to the trouble. She proves that even tribal women can tame their subjugators, but there is clear note of opposition and dismissal in her eyes. Perhaps this is because of the white blood running in her veins; as the narrator writes, "yes, there is something true in Mary, the power of Australian blood" (13). She finds some measure of independence because of her outcaste status. The society also does not inflict any command on her because of her cross origin and thus *The Hunt* marks the triumph of subaltern women in the form of Oraon speaking against them. Mary Oraon is apparently a role model for the third world women because of the situation of her birth; her mixed blood is frequently identified as the source of her power. She has been the voice to the people who have faced centuries of subjugation from external as well as internal colonizers. She is the subaltern's voice of resistance certainly saying no to her tormentor.

Another strong symbol of subaltern battle is *Douloti the Bountiful*. Here, Mahasweta Devi pictures Douloti a fourteen year old girl who dies at the age of twenty seven and after years of regular abuse of her tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease spread over the "map of India" on India's day of independence. She is a symbol of tribal women who are exploited in India in every second of their lives. *Douloti the Bountiful* spotlights the life of subaltern. The story of Douloti has an outrageous inequity and exploitation in India where tribal folks have no trust with freedom, and their life is presided over by neo colonisers. The story symbolizes the misfortune and struggles of these tribes who are steeped in bonded labour. Douloti represents the modern day slavery within the tribes of India. Ganori Nagesia portrays the tragic fate of kamiyas throughout India who cannot get down from this condition. Due to this forced state he is supposed to see his daughter's marriage with paramananda, the pimp in disguise. In post independent phase women from tribal communities are susceptible to enslavement and are regularly abused owing to their gender and ethnicity. *Douloti the Bountiful* voices the dehumanization of tribal's mainly of the Kamiya whores who are confined in regular manipulative practices of land grabbing and brutal bonded labour. In the village of Seora the disclosure of Rajput Brahmins was due to land grabbing along with the availability of

inexpensive labours, which as a result ended in exchange of money. This is the sad part of social set up of independent India where freedom is just in the name, where as many Douloti's die on average. Though government of India has put an end to bonded labour system, but the depraved method endures. But the tribal enslavement is largely due to impoverishment and unawareness. The disempowered poor people are without food and land and this makes them Kamiyas, like how Ganori Nagesia has turned into a bonded labour. Rajput Brahmin Munabar Singh chandela is an paradigm of outward and boundless power, he has become a king of the jungle by virtue of his power of lending money to the tribes, The writer writes that " he is a king of strength of loans, he is the government by strength of loans, he is the Patwari, he is the judge, the verdict of the court" (21) Ganori Nagesia has become his Kamiya as he has given his thumb print to Munabar to get a sum of three hundred rupees.

The most important aspect of tribal life is that their bleak frame of mind towards their life, in which they don't want to think or try as their minds are benumbed with years of enslavement, this is the prime strand for their uninterrupted oppression. There is also a practise among the tribal's of Seora village, in which they are indented to arrange a feast during the time of marriage and they are also asked to execute a purification rituals when any of them happen to go to prison and return. Such kind of things makes them lend money from the moneylenders, and the money is entered in the ledger book and the interest keeps on increases unreasonable to a range where it cannot be paid back for generations. In *Douloti the Bountiful*, the freedom which should have liberate people like GanoriNagesia, very ironically provoke confinement. Bono quotes his experience of working at Dhanabad's coal mines at old Bhuaneswar. In such battles, the women folk are sexually exploited and paid less. Explaining this plight in "can the subaltern speak [?] Speculations on widow sacrifice", Gayatri Chakravorthy Spivak writes. ' On the other side of the international division of labour, the subjects of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation... and ... The women in the shadow" (289)

According to Spivak, Douloti is super vulnerable as, "clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways" (297). Girls like Douloti are

merchandise to be grant by crooks like Paramananda to lascivious costumers like Latia and Singhji. Similarly when Paramananda after talking to Kishan, he laments to Rampriyari,” I know what he will do. As long as he sees the goods are drawing customers, he will buzz like a Doug-fly and try to spoil the trade”(54). For people like Paramananda and his son these Kamiyas are easily accessible hunt for enslavement. She silently receives her dejected barbaric life as a predestined after-effect of her destiny. Mahasweta Devi believes that women are stronger than men but at the same time their sufferings multiply because of their body.

In the case of Douloti she has become a wounded person; she is induced by Paramananda on the promise of marriage and then enforced her into strumpet. The caste system and its difference are rules. You are taking the name of Rama the king of the Raghus, but didn't kill Shambuk? Shambuk was a Sudhra... caste difference, untouchability- these are God's rule. You can pray, you can praise Rama, but this will not change... everything will be as before (40). Such things strengthen the argument they put forth to subjugate the weak and their authority. They taciturnly receive their subjugation as something inescapable.

Towards the end Douloti is found in absolutely bleak, due to Brijnath's glutton proceeded in rough trade and her health crumbled traumatically as, Not as a beggar like Somni, not to become a village-prostitute like Jhalo, but destitute in quite another way, Douloti left the whorehouse (90).while in the hospital at Tohri, she asks the doctor, I won't live, isn't it? (93). She accepts the reality that something us going down, finishing her body... Pain is climbing her entire chest, upward, finally succumbing to the pain. "Douloti lay down. The pain becomes cough, the cough became blood, Douloti closed her eyes" (93). She died very fiercely, her blood covering the whole of India. She symbolizes the poor who constitute a vast majority of India. Bono Nagesia is astonished to find that, Douloti having bonded with three hundred rupees in 1962 – raised forty thousand rupees over a period of eight years, she was "Bountiful" enough to colour the mammoth map of India therefore "Douloti, is like a colossal tower signifies the importance of the subaltern while declaring all the while her nonexistence: she is all over India" (*Rites of, 93*).

Her grievous demise on Independence Day, questions the notion of Independence. She is a metaphor for the untold plight of the marginalized all over the country. Many of Mahasweta Devi's characters exhibit strength and they strive to take part in battle and may be seen heading towards organic intellectuality. The entire narratives of the writer expose female resistance through their speech and action. Mary and Douloti are example of retaliation and withstand in their own ways to their circumstances. Spivak considers that through Douloti Mahasweta Devi represents the hard truth and says that this is internalized gendering perceived as ethical choice is the hardest roadblock for women the world over (2001 xxiv).

### CONCLUSION

The narratives are a strong tale of subaltern women. Mahasweta Devi stories includes a space for the tribal folks which is a site of enslavement and supremacy but at the same time it exemplifies as an evenly strong, executor to topsy-turvy the whole game of marginalization. In *The Hunt*, Mary is a symbol of resistance in terms of economic and social empowerment. She strives for emancipation from the narrow confines of gender roles prescribed for women. The narrative *Douloti the Bountiful* highlights the horror of subaltern life. The tribal women topple the stereotyped gender role directed to them by withstanding the presiding patriarchy and proclaim their self-esteem and nobility. The subaltern studies discourse intends to focus upon the subaltern voices and their prime agenda is to eventually regain and budge the subaltern voices in the supreme formula. It is an effort to rebuild the reality of the past to add translucent explanation. In these stories Mahasweta Devi exposes the legacy of violence in the lives of the tribal folks, in particular tribal women as victims of sexual exploitation, and the politics of gender, class and caste at various levels, she narrates the tales of women forcibly imprisoned in stereotypical presumption of womanhood preserved through patriarchal ideology and also documents women's retaliation against subjugation which becomes the means of their potential emancipation.

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