

**Existential Crisis and Sphere of agony: A critical study represented in
the Mahasweta Devi's '*Rudali*' and '*Breast Stories*'**

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Abstract:

Literature has long served as an essential element that primarily provides philosophical ideas on how life steward within the self-restrain of socio-political divine providence. There were many literary giants have instigated the minds of readers by exposing the social flaws and hegemony that paralyze the society. The advent of post-colonial and modernism reform had a profound impact on the growing literary development in India, paving the way for Indian English Literature to address the various social ills that have been hindering the lives of millions of people struggling to survive. Especially in our Indian society women are facing existential agony and marginalization which is also a deep rooted like a cancer of our society which has persistence for many centuries. '*Rudali*' and '*Breast Stories*' also reveals the sphere of agony and suffering by an Indian woman.

There are several issues which has taken with the help of some eminent minds in the field of literature. Among these the great personalities, the contribution of Mahasweta Devi cannot be ignored, as her writings were directly addressing the 'Marginalized' and 'Oppressed' sections of women. Apart from her immense literary ability, her active impulse and compassion towards the socially oppressed classes seems beyond our imagination. My paper dwells upon the select works of Mahasweta Devi which examines the 'existential authenticity'. In her works specially, the protagonist is pushed to the limits of existential suffering and distress by elite society, fighting for their rights and uprising above their hegemonic rulers or accepting their fate. My paper also throws a light into the entire life of a woman under sorrow and destruction.

Keywords: Marginalization, Existential Crisis, Exploitation, Subaltern, Social Flaws, Post-Colonial Reform.

“Charitra jab pavitra hai, toh kyun hai yeh dasa teri....yeh papiyon ko haq nahi, ki leh pariksha teri, ki leh pariksha teri, tu khud ki khoj mein nikal, tu kis liye hatash hai, tu chal, teri wajood ki samay ko bhi talash hai” (line by Amitabh Bachhan “Pink” movie)

Mahasweta Devi is one of the foremost writer in an Indian Women writers in English. She had made abundant input in the field of the English Literature. There are many other Indian women writers both novelists and poets who write and talk extensively to exert a place in society. They truly portrays the Indian culture, tradition, history and all the variants required for the enrichment of literature. The post independent Indian women have contributed remarkably and also have a diverse sense of their identity. Unlike earlier writers they are not conventional and also not influenced by any folktales, epics and myths.

Rashmi Bajaj says about the recent writings of Indian women writings in English in her book that:

“we have here increased social consciousness; a strong awareness of identity as woman, championing of women’s cause problems of alienation and identity crisis, daring portrayal of sex and emphasis on the study of personal relationships.” (p.no. 28)

Mahasweta Devi always came across the colonial and patriarchal discourse and also her stories do exemplify the minor details of the oppressed and suppressed women like living, suffering and enduring suffering. Her fiction also offers an array of female’s figurative situation in society as well as their materialistic use of the body for the social and economic purpose. In our society women suffers a lot due to the patriarchal society. They suppressed by a male patriarchal and to bring out from this the writer Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Mahasweta Devi tried a lot. We also know that not every woman belong to the upper class or faces the fate of misery, but every single woman has the same tragedy to endure but many of them have similarities.

Mahasweta Devi was born on 14, January, 1926 in Dhaka. She was an Indian writer in Bengali and wrote many literary works such as ‘*Hajar Chaurashir Maa*’ which is translated as ‘*Mother of 1084*’ by Samik Bandyopadhyay, ‘*Rudali*’ translated by Anjum Katyal ad ‘*Stanyadayini*’ is translated as ‘*Breast Stories*’ by Gayatri

Chakravorty Spivak etc. She also worked for the tribal people ('Lodha' and 'Shabar') of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh states of India. She was also honoured by many literary Awards such as *Sahitya Akademi Award*, *Ramon Magsaysay Award* and *Jnanpith Award* along with India's civilian awards '*Padma Shri*' and '*Padma Vibhushan*'. However, her voice is very limited within a certain territory. People who are from Bengal and known Bengali language and also people who are known to tribal-indigenous life, marginal life of women are mostly her readers. This territory expanded through the translations and criticisms of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, well known critique in contemporary literature of the world. Sometimes female are shown as a weaker docile and fragile. The social structure entraps women in limited world and it always makes them weaker. Their freedom and identity comes under crisis. When the situation becomes sophisticated, the female characters in Mahasweta Devi stories make a strong resistance to the hegemonizing interference of the male character. Devi also forces on the women's self definition against the evil of sexism, classism and subalternism.

We also came across that in her stories she examines the women's search for selfhood through an analysis of the relationships of individuals to the community. In Mahasweta Devi's '*Breast Stories*' divided in three different stories that is '*Draupadi*', '*Breast Giver*' and '*Behind the Bodice*', in all these the '*Breast*' is a common subjugation. It has been also called '*The Breast Trilogy*'. The breast is not a symbol in these stories. In '*Draupadi*', it is represented as an '*erotic*' object which is transformed into an object of torture and revenge and between these sexuality and gender violence begins to weave. Likewise in the '*Breast Giver*', the survival object transformed into a commodity. It also make visible the indeterminacy between filial allegiance and gender-violence between house and temple, sometimes between domination and exploitation.

In '*Behind the Bodice*', a Devi, describes the bitter truth of 'normality' that decries towards the sexuality as male violence. In the eyes of the caretaker it is just that Gangor's breasts have been destroyed. Devi reveals the position of a rural women who endeavours to raise the voice against the dominated people through her story '*Draupadi*'. In these the Jashoda is a female Protagonist and she is working in a Halder's house and here she is nothing more than a milk giving animal. Devi discloses how Jashoda is compared with the cows while being given more food stuffs to be eaten.

"Mrs. Halder believes that the more the cow eats the more milk. She gives Jashoda's place in the house is now above the Mother Cows. The mistress's sons become incarnate Brahma and create progeny Jashoda preserves the progeny."

Jashoda never agrees for the breast feeding but the situation changes her, she only feeds the children of landlord because they gave a food to her sons in an exchange. These goes on continuously for a long span of time until the breast of Jashoda dries up completely and that time cancer catches her breasts. After sometimes the innocent Jashoda dies of cancer at the end. Similarly, she projects another story '*Behind the Bodice*' in which an urban girl, attracted her breasts and exposes because for the sake of some snaps but for Gangor it turns into the victim of rape and tortures. Devi attracts the attention of the readers towards the keen desires of the males who would gaze at Gangor's breasts for their sexual gratification.

"Ro-rokar sisak-sisak kar, kahta mein karun kahani, tum suman nochate sunte karte jaani...." (By Jaishankar Prasad- Ansoo)

Devi's another short story that is '*Rudali*' in which she portrays the character of '*Sanichari*' who is a young girl who has a dream of going out for earning because for her living. She belongs from the lower caste and also being marginalized by tradition caste and most importantly the socio-economic and religious condition rolled most. Sanichari resists against her family, society and courageously moves ahead in pursuits of her survival- stomach, hunger and food. Her hunger makes Sanichari a stronger, bold, responsible persona from a helpless lower caste woman. The character of Sanichari compared with the wretchedness and she is also belongs to the prevalent corrupt system. She is also not represented as an individual but stands for the whole community of the down trodden in the village. She is depicted as a sad, suffering human being who finally emerges as a survivor.

Mahasweta Devi unmasks the pathetic life of the protagonist Sanichari in the novella '*Rudali*', her name itself was considered as a bad significance by the village people.

"To herself she would say –Huh! Because I was born on and named after a Saturday, that made me an unlucky daughter-in-law! You were born on a Monday was your life any happier? Somri, Budhu, Moongri, Bishri- do any of them have happier lives?" (Mahasweta Devi 54)

Pramod. K (2019) echoes the same as,

“In the very beginning, she is presented as ‘voiceless’ dalit woman undergoing suppression but onwards she becomes an empowering agent of revolt against age – old social customs. The novelist undoubtedly exposes the deceit and corruption of the feudals against the lower castes.”

She belonged to the marginalised community but the burden was shared by her hardworking husband. They had hopes to live a moderate life. But the fate turns the condition of whole life. Her husband dies due to contaminated drink, after that her son Budhua was a hope to took the yoke of poverty on his shoulder; she mentions about female as weaker and underprivileged group. It is traditional thinking about gender biasness. This concept is internalized in the society. They observe female as the society thinks. Similarly G. Gulam Tariq pertinently expresses his views in *“The World of Marginalized”* in Mahasweta Devi’s play *‘Mother of 1084.’*

“Exploitations of the Adivasis by her land of rich or the urban administrative machinery callously perpetuating a legacy of complicity with the colonizers, bonded labour and prostitution. The destitution and misery of city dwellers who are condemned to live at the fringes and eke-out a meager livelihood, the plight of woman who are breadwinners and victims of male sexual violence, dependent widows, ill-treated wives and unwanted daughters whose bodies can fetch a price- are adequately presented.” (52)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out the female harsh suffering in an introduction of these stories because her worked being closed with Mahasweta Devi. She has depicted marginalized society where much exploitation occurs rather than educated society.

Mahasweta Devi gives a psychological view of the mother who is always been left alone and the dreams of a mother scattered into pieces. Then after she never loses a hope, after some days her son also left the world, then her dreams changed shape in the form of her grandson Haroa, but Haroa was also ran away leaving her behind to fight her own battle. Then she feels hopeless. Another hope rays when she met with Bikhni (her childhood friend). They both are in search of a job for survival, because both were like an orphanage. As Dulan, her neighbour says,

“there is no bigger god than one’s belly, for the belly’s sake everything is permissible” and asks them to go as Rudali’s, Sanichari exploded and said, “I can’t shed tears,” Dulan replied “it is not emotional tears, these tears are your livelihood just as you cut wheat and plough land, so you’ll be able to do it.”

The research reattempted to explore the spectacular creations of Mahasweta Devi’s short stories ‘*Breast Stories*’ and novella ‘*Rudali*’. My paper also delved deeper into the centrepiece of marginalization of woman and caste-based oppression. Devi has brilliantly conveyed her thematic perception into the physical world, her contributions for the ‘*Upliftment of marginalized*’. She also reflects into the existentialism and sphere of agony which the female protagonists suffer. They all suffered a lot into a patriarchal and marginalized society. She also raises the voice towards the issues of bonded slavery, corruption, poverty, exploitation, caste discrimination which are deeply rooted in Indian Soil. But now, a day the situation turns because this all situations is the darkest periods of our nation.

“Kya kehti ho thehro Naari, Sankalp ashru jal se apne, tum daan kar chuki pehle hi Jeevan ke sone se sapne.... Nari! Tum kewal shraddha ho, vishwas-rajat-nag pagtal mein, piyush-srot si baha karo, jeevan ke sundar samtal mein....” (By Jaishankar Prasad)

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