

An Outlook on Frames of Tortures in the Short Story of Mahasweta Devi's 'Outcast'

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Abstract

This paper aims to interpret women's sufferings and tortures undergone by the women characters Dhouli, Shanichari, Joshima and Chinta of Mahasweta Devi's "Outcast". All these women are found to be the victims of exploitation. Mahasweta Devi, one of the great contemporary women writers working for tribal and marginalized communities for years, explains the position of marginalized women in India in this story. They do not have any proper identification in society. The sufferings of the marginalized women have been depicted in reality by Mahasweta Devi. She states the inexpressible truth of women's torture and brings life to those characters through her writings, making a woman resist the marginalized society.

Keywords: tortures, marginalized, Outcast, exploitation, oppression

Introduction

Mahasweta Devi, a Padmashree award winner and social activist, is a renowned Bengali writer who portrays the life of the tribal people and, more specifically, the marginalized characters, especially women on social margins of class and caste. She often narrates the brutal oppression faced by the tribal people at the hands of the influential upper caste persons comprising landlords, money lenders and government officials. She has been studying and writing continually about the life and struggles faced by the tribal communities in the states like Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. She has entirely involved herself to work for the liberation of the tribal people from these struggles.

An outcast is someone who is rejected or cast out from their home or society or in some way excluded or ignored. The outcast archetype usually lives outside society's norms because they have been purposefully cast out by society but sometimes have left on their own decision,

unable to accept the chains that society places on them.

Devi's Outcast portrays four stories with women protagonists, out of which three of them are of Adivasi descent. All four stories find Devi's lifelong concern towards tribal people for the severe kinds of exploitation they come across in their life. Rape prevails as a chronic trope that underwrites the destiny of the protagonists. Dhouli is a Dusad an untouchable, and a young widow. Misrilal, the son of a wealthy, upper-caste Brahman named Hanumanji Misra, falls in love with her. Dhouli knows the destiny of the women of her community who become victims of the lust of the Brahmin family and repulses him. However, he convinces her with his sweet words and promises to marry her, saying, "the government law to sanctions our marriage" (Dhouli12). As Dhouli is young, she cannot control her emotions, and she gets pregnant. As soon as Misrilal's family knows about it, they send Misrilal away, and Dhouli and her mother are subjected to humiliation. Misrilal casts aside the responsibility of the newborn child and its mother by marrying another woman belonging to his own caste and settling in Ranchi, a distant Indian city. When Dhouli becomes the breadwinner for her son, she sells her body to earn bread for her son and herself, whereas Misrilal returns and becomes influential in compelling her to leave her village and move to the city to become a prostitute.

The destiny of a woman like Dhouli in her community becomes a question mark

and becomes dependent on the Brahmin family's approach. If the Brahmin family takes concern for the victim and gives out share alone, she is left in peace. Otherwise, she is made an outcast and is compelled to become a whore. Dhouli tries to resist her difficult situation, but absolute hunger moves her to become a common prostitute. This invites the wrath of the Brahmin family on Dhouli, and she is driven out of the village because she has brought dishonour to them by allowing "the door through which the lion entered" to be "visited by rats and swine!" (Dhouli30).

In Mahasweta Devi's second story, Shanichari, an oraoon girl from Rata is also marginalized like Dhouli by her own society. Her story is told against the background of the Adijati Raksha Movement. A middle-aged woman, Gohuman, has sold Shanichari to a brickkiln owner in Barasat, West Bengal, where she faces economic and sexual exploitation leading to pregnancy. The tribal people are moved from their locality and are forced to migrate to Kolkata to work in the brick kilns in inhuman conditions. Shanichari refused migrating to Kolkata but during the movement when the BMP, CRP and BSP unleashed a reign of terror, they subject her to gang rape along with the other women and leave them in the jungle without food or clothing: "Without clothes, the girls are forced to hide in the forest...'we'll get you new clothes and take you to Kolkata to work in the brick kilns. You'll work hard, eat well, make money. Come, come!'" (Shanichari46-47). Eventually Shanichari is obligated to seek

work in the brick kiln where she is raped daily by Rahmat, the brick kiln owner. His friends, Cronies, the local goons, and even the police gives tortures to the flesh of female body, and of course, the cuts. There is no way to escape as the brick kiln is enveloped from the world outside. However, the brick kiln shuts off and Shanichari returns to the village with Rahmat's child in her womb, and is made an outcast. This short story is agonizingly real. It presents another face of mistreatment to the tribal society.

In Mahasweta Devi's third story, Josmina is a HO tribal. There were much happiness and peace in the first part of her life when she gets married to Sarjom Purti. Though they were poor they lived a satisfied life in Rajabasha. But the village money lender, Nandlal Shahu who is part of supplying cheap coolie labour to Punjab, mesmerises them with the dream of higher wages by saying, "An excellent job. Big farmers. Plenty to eat. The two of you will get ,say, about 400 a month. Enough clothes. You will come back with almost 5000 bucks! Sit at home and enjoy!" (The fairytale of Rajabasha 63).

Both of them are sold to a landowner Niranjan Singh. They have to work for eighteen hours a day. Niranjan seduces Josmina daily. Somehow, Josmina and Sarjom Purti are try to get away and take shelter with Karnal Singh. But the same music of rape and exploitation is repeated in their life. Finally they escape and come back to Rajabasha with the prospect of beginning life afresh, but her

bright vision of hope turns out to be a illusion, as she finds the symptoms of motherhood, a condition forced upon her by her master in Punjab. In the end, to save her beloved husband from being ostracized from his own community, Josmina commits suicide. Thus, the life of young Joshima ends up painfully without any consideration for her feelings and pain of the suffering. She sacrificed her life in order to protect her husband from ostracism.

Mahasweta Devi, makes it clear through her narrative that the frames of tortures is conferred by the politics of power dynamics and the domination implemented and enjoyed by a privileged class over the tribal people. In the Panchayat meeting where Dhoulis fate has been decided by the senior Misra, Dhoulis is provided with two options—of being burnt alive, or having to adopt the path of prostitution in an "Other world." Hanumanji announced, "Dhoulis cannot practise prostitution in this village. She can go to some town, to Ranchi, and do her whoring there. If not, her house will be set on fire and mother, daughter; child will be burned to death" (31). It is significant and pertinent to note that even the tribal untouchables, the dusads and ganjus, do not make any protest against this verdict.

Women protagonists of Mahasweta devi are found to be very innocent. All the four characters has started their life with lot of dreams. They felt all their dreams got destroyed because of their fate.

In "shanichari," Mahasweta Devi presents the young tribal girl, Shanichari's as so

innocent. Shanichari, along with her grandmother “enjoyed the train ride to Tohri, sitting on the floor of the [train] compartment, chugging along, having a good time picking the lice from each other’s hair” (34). This oblique reference to Shanichari and her 108 grandmother’s subaltern state, suggested by the phrase “sitting on the floor of the [train] compartment,” is further reinforced through an apparently innocuous folk-tale fragmentarily narrated by the grandmother: ‘Don’t you know the one [story] about the carpenter who carved a girl out of wood and became her father? The weaver who gave her clothes and became her brother? The goldsmiths who gifted her jewellery and became her uncle’s? Didn’t the sindoorwala [the seller of vermilion] bring her to life by giving her sin door?’ (35). All her innocence are misused by arrogant giants in the society.

Mahasweta Devi implies about the protagonists of the stories who have no protection against the harsh social structures of the society in which they live. The circumstances of the widows are analysed to be very inferior. They are forced to lead a outcaste life away from the society. Though we live in the modern world and talk with excessive pride and self-satisfaction of scientific and technological advancements and the economic growth, no government policies or schemes put forth to them even to satisfy their essential needs. Besides poverty, the women victims undergo and witness endless oppression and sexual

tortures. The cruel reality is that their own victimizers condemn and abuse them.

The tortures depicted by Devi in all the four stories of “Outcast” are unbearably bleak and it is the result of overwhelming reflection of the social system that allows such injustice to continue in the society. It indicates that tortures of rape has become a predictable fact of daily life for the tribal women who risk out their natural habitat of living in order to live for their livelihood. The most vulnerable fact is that that the whole administrative machinery involved with this kind of unlawful activity makes these incidents guiltier. Devi depicts the fate of women who are doubly colonized and victimized in the Indian social system . A fearless crusader for social justice, Devi's characters are found to rebel against the parameters of suitability set down by the society. . In short, she has used her pen as a weapon to eradicate the evils of socio - economic customs and traditions. We may in need of several volumes to examine and understand the works of Devi.

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