



EMPOWERING FEMINIST DISCOURSE: UNRAVELLING SOCIETAL STRUGGLES IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S *MOTHER OF 1084*

GAJANAN DAYARAMJI TAYADE

Assistant Professor
Department of English
Shri Shivaji Arts, Commerce & Science
College Akot, Dist. Akola, Maharashtra.
Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University Amravati.
(MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the empowering feminist perspectives found within Mahasweta Devi's critically acclaimed novel, Mother of 1084. As a prominent feminist writer in Indian English Literature, Devi skillfully weaves a tapestry of human values and complex relationships, while also confronting the societal struggles for self-identity, self-assertion, individuality, and freedom faced by women. Her literary work is deeply rooted in sociological and cultural contexts and driven by a strong feminist ideology that profoundly influences her storytelling. Drawing from Mother of 1084, this paper explores how Devi utilizes female characters as powerful devices to expose and challenge a society that perpetuates discrimination and victimization of women. By highlighting the multifaceted barriers, including cultural norms, legal constraints, political dynamics, and social restrictions, Devi offers a profound critique of the patriarchal structures that constrain women's agency and opportunities for self-actualization.

Key words: *empowering, transformative dialogue, societal norms, gender dynamics, discrimination, victimization,*

GAJANAN DAYARAMJI TAYADE

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INTRODUCTION

Feminist writers have long harnessed the power of fiction to give voice to their inner struggles, championing themes of self-identity, self-assertion, individuality, and freedom. These literary works draw strength from the sociological and cultural contexts in which they emerge, underpinned by the core tenets of feminist ideology. Among the luminous voices in this realm, Mahasweta Devi occupies a revered position in the landscape of Indian English Literature. Her literary contributions delve beyond the realm of storytelling, probing human values and intricate relationships with profound insight. In her renowned novel, *Mother of 1084*, Devi artfully employs female characters as vehicles to lay bare a society that perpetuates discrimination and victimization of women. With unwavering courage, she illuminates the multifaceted struggles faced by women, exposing the patriarchal structures and norms that circumscribe their lives. Beyond mere storytelling, Devi's narratives function as powerful social commentaries, unearthing the cultural, legal, political, and social barriers that constrict women's agency. One of Devi's remarkable abilities is to draw parallel narratives that highlight the symbiotic relationship between the struggle for women's rights and the pursuit of political empowerment. By intertwining the narratives of her female protagonists with political struggles, she underscores the inseparable link between women's liberation and broader societal progress. In this way, Devi portrays the pivotal role that women novel in shaping the destiny of their communities and nation.

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This paper delves into the empowering feminist perspectives found within Mahasweta Devi's critically acclaimed novel, *Mother of 1084*. As a prominent feminist writer in Indian English Literature, Devi skillfully weaves a tapestry of human values and complex relationships, while also confronting the societal struggles for self-identity, self-assertion, individuality, and freedom faced by women. Her literary work is deeply rooted in sociological and cultural contexts and driven by a strong feminist ideology that profoundly influences her storytelling. Drawing from *Mother of 1084*, this paper explores how Devi utilizes female characters as powerful devices to expose and challenge a society that perpetuates discrimination and victimization of women. By highlighting the multifaceted barriers, including cultural norms, legal constraints, political dynamics, and social restrictions, Devi offers a profound critique of the patriarchal structures that constrain women's agency and opportunities for self-actualization.

Indian society grapples with profound conflicts and contradictions, particularly in its treatment of women. Females find themselves on the periphery of family dynamics, both in their parental homes and within their marital households. They lack the agency to determine their roots, and their societal status remains precarious, leaving them with a pervasive sense of insecurity. Devi, as a woman, explores the multifaceted challenges faced by every woman in this hypocritical society. They are compelled to occupy a secondary role while simultaneously expected to be the linchpin holding families together. This dichotomy inflicts a profound psychological toll, as it forces women to grapple with the clash between their intrinsic knowledge and the expectations imposed upon them by their environment. In "*Mother of 1084*," Devi skillfully portrays the inner turmoil experienced by women as they navigate this internal conflict.

In "*Mother of 1084*," Sujatha, a grieving mother, comes to a profound realization about why her murdered son, Brati, chose to join a violent uprising. The narrative skillfully blends indigenous oral histories with contemporary events to delve into the bitter and often bloody relationship between tribal communities and India's dominant classes and systems. Alongside this exploration, it sensitively portrays the intricate emotions of a mother.

The novel draws its strength from a rich tapestry of history, folk myths, and the stark realities of the present day. Devi uses a recent historical event as a lens through which to comment on the present, presenting it as a cautionary fiction that universalizes the human experience, a narrative that sheds light on what drives many sons to martyrdom. On one level, the novel might seem like a straightforward account of the brutal suppression of an apolitical woman in the role of a mother. However, it ultimately reveals her awakening to a deeper truth about martyrdom, transcending the specific circumstances to touch upon broader themes of sacrifice and devotion.



The novel "Mother of 1084" unfolds within the span of a single day in the life of its central character, Sujata. She is the mother of Brati, also known as corpse number 1084, and hails from a relatively affluent middle-class family. Despite being a sensitive wife and a loving mother, Sujata feels like a stranger within her own household, where her role has been reduced to that of a mere cog in the machinery. She finds solace and a sense of belonging in the company of her younger son, Brati Chatterjee. Unlike her other children, Brati is a man of ideals, and it is his life and activities that Sujata struggles to comprehend. The absence of understanding between them adds to the tragic depth of the novel. It's only when Sujata pieces together the fragments of her son's life that she can find a moral rationale for his involvement in the uprising, and this process of discovery continues until the novel's conclusion.

Sujata, a traditional and subjugated woman, reflects on her life two years prior when she prepared to bring Brati into the world. She faced the challenges of pregnancy alone, without any support, and Brati was born on the dawn of January 17, 1948. Her life became a misery due to her husband's lustful behaviour and her overbearing mother-in-law. As a traditional wife, she continues to coexist with her husband, who is the family's primary breadwinner and caretaker of their children. However, the patriarchal norms of society prevent women from breaking free from the entanglements of family ties. Sujata's husband, Dibyanath, treats her as a mere childbearing machine, mirroring her mother-in-law's attitude. She is not even allowed to care for her children, Jyothi, Neepa, and Tuli, and they grow up inheriting the same character as their grandmother. Sujata finds no fulfillment in her marital life, leading to frustration and disillusionment, causing her to forget her self-worth as a woman.

In contrast to her other children, Brati has a special affection for his mother. He is the only son who yearns for her and cries for her when she is away working at the bank. He revels in her presence. Sujata reminisces about the fateful night when she received a phone call in her sleep, delivering the devastating news of her beloved son's death. She is not only shattered by this news but also by her husband's callousness. Dibyanath denies Sujata the use of his car on the day of Brati's death, fearing that it might tarnish his social standing. He even goes to great lengths to prevent Brati's name from being published in newspapers, attempting to erase Brati's existence from their home by relocating his picture, old shoes, and raincoat from the common areas to a room on the second floor.

Brati's death leaves a profound void in Sujata's life, and even two years after his passing, his memories continue to haunt her. She is determined to uncover the reasons behind her son's sacrifice. Despite the deep emotional connection between Sujata and Brati, she remains largely unaware of his ideology and his activities. As she reflects, "Brati was the soul of my life, yet I know so little about him" (Devi 8).



Sujata's quest for understanding leads her into a series of encounters with individuals who shared Brati's cause. This learning process continues until she gradually aligns herself with her son's ideology. Her interactions with Somu's mother and Nandhini open her eyes to a different facet of life to which she had previously been a stranger. She begins to identify with the suffering of humanity and transitions from her previous position as an apolitical mother to becoming socially conscious.

Nandhini, an activist and devoted follower of Brati, provides Sujata with insight into a part of her son's life and helps her realize the distressing social realities. Sujata's confrontation with Somu's mother, who lost her son to a mob's outrage, fills Sujata with a deep sense of empathy. It is profoundly moving to witness people entrusted with the responsibility of upholding human values acting callously toward the innocent. This contrast is especially evident when comparing Brati's father with Somu's father. Somu's father's futile attempt to seek help from the police station and his subsequent return with shattered hopes underline the inhumanity of the situation. Somu's mother's heart-wrenching cry upon identifying her son in the police morgue shocks even those who may have appeared stone-hearted.

Mahasweta Devi's literary works predominantly feature female protagonists and serve as a powerful vehicle to expose the societal injustices and discrimination faced by women. Her writings have garnered political support from various quarters. Devi firmly believes that women and society are interconnected, with both being essential for the well-being of the people. She emphasizes the cultural, legal, political, and social restrictions that limit women's freedoms and seeks to liberate them from being mere appendages or shadows of men. Her literary heroines are often portrayed as courageous intellectuals who challenge the prevailing norms that victimize women.

Throughout her writings, Mahasweta Devi vividly depicts the lives of ordinary women, particularly tribal women. She explores the simple joys and sorrows they experience, the exploitation and suffering they endure, and the abject poverty that often defines their existence. Her treatment of women in her works is imbued with empathy, and her profound humanism reflects a deep-seated love for humanity, particularly for those who are suffering. Most of her short stories and novels shed light on the lives of oppressed and neglected tribal women who are subjugated by society and exploited by the greed, narrow-mindedness, and selfishness of men.

Mahasweta Devi's prominence in contemporary literature is a testament to her ongoing efforts to bring the struggles of oppressed communities to the forefront. Her works have contributed to the emergence of these communities from the shackles of subjugation, slavery, and oppression. She continues to be a beacon of hope and a voice for those who have long been marginalized and silenced.



CONCLUSION:

The history of the world is fundamentally a narrative of conflict between two distinct communities: the community of oppressors and the oppressed often referred to as the subalterns. When these two communities, each embodying opposing value systems, coexist, the one with political, economic, and technological dominance tends to subjugate the other. Mahasweta Devi's unique literary approach involves taking unconventional themes from contemporary life and transforming them into works of artistic excellence. At the core of her creative endeavours is the central message of survival through struggle. Consequently, her writing vividly portrays the authentic and harrowing details of abject poverty through the lives of real subaltern characters with their unique histories. Driven by a profound social concern, she is compelled to write about the plight of the impoverished, shedding light on their struggles and suffering.

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