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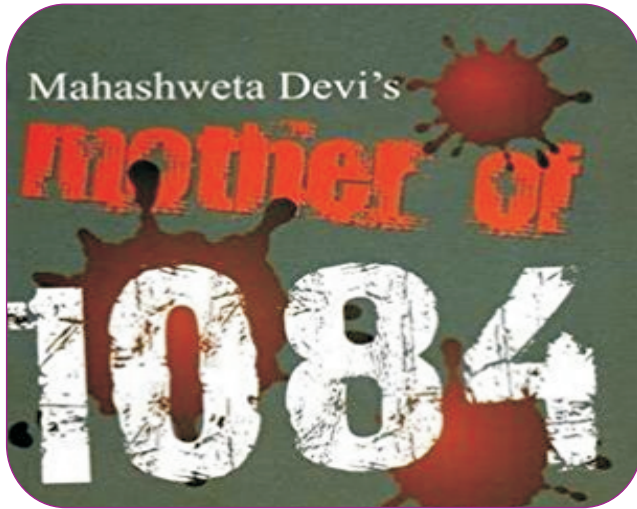
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A WOMAN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST PATRIARCHY: A STUDY OF MAHASHWETA DEVI'S *MOTHER OF 1084*



ABSTRACT:-

Mother of 1084 is a novel written by famous Bengali fiction writer Mahashweta Devi. Originally the novel was written in Bengali in 1974. It is originally titled as HajarChaurasi Ma. The novel is translated into English by SamikBandyopadhyay. The novel has the backdrop of Naxalite movement of 1970-80s. It revolves around the character of Sujata who is a aristocratic middle class woman. The aim of the present paper is to examine Sujata's position in her family and to describe her struggle against patriarchal system.

KEY NOTES: Backdrop, Naxalite, Aristocratic, Patriarchal.

INTRODUCTION

Mahashweta Devi had never written as a feminist writer. She was a social activist for the tribal rights. But she deals with the problems of fair sex in her fiction very realistically. In an interview she says:

I am a woman, and I am writing. But I am not writing of women alone. What I am writing, most of my books, it is about class exploitation, the underclass is exploited, men or women together. Of course, women get worse part of it, but not always. Definitely I am interested in women's position, women's thought, but

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I am more interested in active work (Dickman 33).

Devi is a recipient of number of awards including the highest literary award of the country the Jnanpith. She has been awarded with the Padam Vibhushan by Government of India. She also received Ramon Magsaysay Award which is called the Nobel of Asia. The novel *Mother of 1084* has the backdrop of Naxalite movement which was started from the Naxalbari village of West Bengal in 1970s. Later the movement started spreading to the state and it also influenced the college going students. In the novel Brati, son of Sujata is also killed by the state for his ideological leanings with the revolutionaries. The novel is set in Calcutta on the day of 17th January which is both the birth and death anniversary of Brati. The novel is divided into four parts: Morning, Afternoon, Later Afternoon and Evening. In all the parts Sujata meets different people. The writer named the world in which Sujata is living as 'Bhadralok'.

The patriarchal system always tries to suppress the voice of women. When it gives all the freedom to men, a number of restrictions are imposed on women. In the words of Simon de Beauvoir, "One is not born woman, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 87). Simon describes the sex is biologically constructed but gender is socially constructed. In Catherine Thankamma's opinion:

Patriarchy is the system that traces family descent and economic inheritance down the male line. In a joint family the senior most male is the head, the patriarchy, while in the nuclear families of today it is the father (Thankamma 92).

Sylvia Walby elaborates the definition of patriarchy by saying, "a system of social structure, and practices in which men dominate and exploit women"

(Walby 20).

The detailed description of Sujata's struggle with the patriarchal system is given below:

1. Oppression by her mother in law:

Sujata's mother in law never supports her. Even at the time of delivery she doesn't go with her to the hospital. When Sujata complains about it to Dibyanath, her husband hesays "Ma is too soft, can't you understand that? She can't stand all this pain and commotion" (Devi 2). When Dibyanath, her husband establishes his firm of chartered accountant, he and his mother wants Sujata to leave her job. Devi writes, "Mother and son would go on complaining that Sujata wanted to be independent, that she didn't like to share responsibilities of running the household or bringing up children" (Devi 24). Dibyanath's mother has complete control over him and he dances like a puppet before her. He never tries to enquire about the feelings of his wife. Devi writes, "Dibyanath had not allowed Sujata the most common rights the mother has. His mother hold the reins. Dibyanath never knew that one could honor one's mother without humiliating his wife. His wife under his feet, his mother held aloft. That was his ethos" (Devi 45).

Her mother in law doesn't have any compassion for him rather acts like an agent of patriarchy and always tries to suppress her voice. We can observe the extent of oppression from these words: "As long as she had been alive, Sujata had never had the right to buy a sari of her own choice" (Devi 24).

2. Her disagreements with her husband:

Dibyanath is a womaniser who has several affairs outside his home. Like his mother, he never supports Sujata. At the time of Brati's delivery Sujatasays, "She had not expected her husband to come with her even if he had been in town. Why should the doctor expect it? Dibyanath never came with her, never accompanied her when it was time" (Devi 3). He considers her only as a machine for child production. He never notices Sujata's pain and suffering. Devi writes, But he noticed things, he noticed Sujata, he had to be sure that Sujata was fit enough to bear the child again (Devi 3)". Sujata doesn't speak a single word against her husband though she is aware about all his affairs. But the gap between them widens after Brati's death. Brati was her only son who understood her feelings. When Brati is killed, Dibyanath tries his best that his name should not appear in the newspapers. He refuses Sujata to take his car to the morgue. He says, "It would not be the right thing to keep his car waiting before Kantapukur. Anybody could identify the car" (Devi 7). Dibyanath was dead for Sujata from that day. Though they are living under the same roof but Sujata doesn't feel like home there. Dibyanath tries his best to eradicate all the memories of Brati from the house but he fails because Sujata feels his presence everywhere in the house.

3. Sujata's rebellion against patriarchal system:

As long as you remain meek and submissive, patriarchy suppress you more and more. Sujata realizes this fact and rebelled against the oppression. She realizes that even after her full devotion Dibyanath remains unfaithful. She refuses to produce another child after the birth of Brati. Her mother in law and her husband wants her to give up her job at the bank but she refuses to do so. Devi writes, "Refusing to leave her job was Sujata's second act of rebellion. Her first act of rebellion was when Brati was two. She refused to be mother for fifth time" (Devi 46). When Sujata returns home after meeting Nandini Dibyanath asks about her whereabouts all the day but she refuses to tell him anything. "For Dibyanath it was a slap on the face. In the thirty four years of their married life, Sujata had never spoken to him in that tone" (Devi 93).

Sujata tells him clearly that he has no right to ask her anything because she has not been asking him this for thirty two years. She says, "Two years ago, for thirty two years, I never asked you where you spent your evenings, or who accompanied you on your tours for the past ten years, or why you paid the house rent of your ex typist. You are never to ask me a thing. Never" (Devi 93).

From the above description it can be ascertained that the patriarchal system always tries to suppress the voice of women. She is taught to be dutiful to the family and it doesn't matter whether her husband or family is dutiful to her or not. It considers woman as an inferior human being. When Sujata realizes this fact she raises her

voice against her husband and the whole system.

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