

REIMAGINING IDENTITY IN THE LITERARY UNIVERSE OF MAHASHWETA DEVI BY EMPHASISING ON EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MARGINALITY

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Abstract

Through an examination of Mahashweta Devi's canonical work, "Rudali" this research delves into the complexities of identity as it is reinvented from a marginalized perspective, with an emphasis on empowerment. Devi's vast collection of work explores the intersection of oppressed people's unique identities with larger sociopolitical challenges. This study explores the transforming power of marginalized experiences using a multi-faceted method that integrates literary analysis, postcolonial theory, and feminist viewpoints. The research sheds light on how marginalized people may become empowered via a thorough examination of storylines and characters, demonstrating the incredible strength and resilience that is inherent in those on the margins. The power to expose the subaltern's brutal reality and question conventional narratives is what makes Devi's works significant. As shown by Devi, empowerment goes beyond monetary prosperity; it requires an in-depth knowledge of one's identity and the will to go beyond hedonistic pursuits.

Keywords: *Reimagining Identity, Literary Universe, Mahashweta Devi, Empowerment, Marginality.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Through her skill of craftsmanship, Mahashweta Devi examines her social environment and projects the picture of a modern Indian socio-political scenario to deliver equal justice and bring out the best in humankind. In the context of globalization, marketization, and privatization, she employs sociological, psychological, and literary ideas such as deconstruction, postmodernism, postcolonialism, new historicism, and cultural studies with a strong emotional undertone. In light of its rich historical and cultural legacy, which have created her identity, impacted her views, and molded her thinking, she feels that India is a well evolved country. She rejoices in India's shared notable distinctions.

Mahashweta Devi notes that the writer is a lover of wisdom; all information is impermanently connected to the outside world and has a debilitating impact, but pure wisdom is unchangeable and everlasting. This author captures the diverse facets of Indian culture and underlines what social liberalization requires. Her portrayal combines two different levels of sensitivity: that of a humanist and that of an artist. She sheds light on the variety of civilizations and their distinct behaviours and mindsets. Her stories are fuelled by the social environment, and she is able to prominently present several points of view. Her artistic works actively participate in societal tasks to raise social awareness. When sharing her personalities and opinions, she displays her flawless fearlessness. As a subtext in her literary universe, her multifaceted conception of existence is the novel view on the cosmic horizon of literature. In the context of Indian socio-political and economic life, her profound understanding of Indian culture is remarkable. The literary sphere of Mahashweta Devi makes references to the unfortunate occurrence of certain decadent and degenerative tendencies. She also tracks the worrying rise of distortion and conceit that negatively impacts every sphere of Indian culture. By using postmodern techniques to express her concerns about post-colonial India, she creates an intellectual collection of her

literary universe. The text and the motions are well combined. She deserves to be given a prominent place in Indian English literature.

The author sheds light on the intricate intricacies of the human mind and spirit. She has raised awareness in society of the stark imbalance in the allocation of power. The gushing fountain of a happy life is the colourful message of love. A constant supply of warmth is needed to maintain a happy and healthy relationship's development. Her goal is to bridge the divide between the underprivileged and the majority. She demonstrates that she is not just a defender of the poor but also an honest and tenacious storyteller of the reality of the oppressed. Mahashweta Devi's literary universe incorporates elements of a tribal society, complete with struggles, misery, frustration, self-realization, individualism, love, and a burning desire to live. She believes in the resurrection. She keeps an eye on Indian society's social system and demonstrates how the higher caste group rules over the defenceless. She sheds light on the Santhal tribal people of rural Eastern India in BashaiTudu. These people have been suppressed and neglected for decades by the ruling classes. These West Bengali tribal people, who were ejected from their lands, are mostly agricultural laborers who struggle to make ends meet.

1.1.Objectives of the study

- To investigate Mahshweta Devi's writings based on her books and other writings.
- To examine her importance in the annals of literature.
- To know Mahaasweta Devi's view on women's marginalization and empowerment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dave, V. Y. (2023) investigated A critical evaluation of the fiction written by Mahashweta Devi is given. Mahashweta Devi is a well-known author in India whose writings are renowned for their profound influence and for illuminating the difficulties that disadvantaged people endure. The article's author begins by summarizing Devi's life and accomplishments in Indian literature, emphasizing the importance of her contributions. Next, it is stated how important the research project is and what its goal is. Devi's subjects and writing style are briefly discussed in the analysis section, which focuses on important pieces like "Draupadi" and "Breast Stories." To

properly situate Devi's contributions, a comparison with the writings of several other Indian feminist writers is also made. The criticism section examines Devi's use of language and other literary devices in addition to analyzing how she portrays disadvantaged populations. Her works have had a significant influence on Indian culture, but it's also important to consider how they've promoted social change and increased consciousness. Devi's legacy and effect were also examined in this research, with particular attention paid to the manner in which she influenced contemporary Indian authors and supported feminist movements and Indian literature. It also considers the influence her works have had on society at large.

H. P. Sikandar (2024) Researched Mahashweta Devi, a highly regarded writer, journalist, and activist from Bengal, dedicated her life to the cause of India's indigenous people, particularly the women. The literary works of Mahashweta Devi are an amalgam of her encounters with the disenfranchised. She has written hundreds of articles, more than 20 collections of short tales, and more than 100 books. She spent a lot of time with tribes, which allowed her to thoroughly examine how marginalized people lived. This facilitates her ability to closely read the suffering of marginalized people. Devi uses her literary talent to speak for those who lack a voice. Through her creative works, she brought attention to the persecution and exploitation of marginalized populations. Adivasis, Dalits, women, patriarchy, caste hierarchy, moneylenders, bonded labor, subaltern resistance, historical narratives, social alienation, government negligence, education concerns, naxalism, activism of marginalized people, and the subjugation of indigenous people of India are among the major themes she writes about. In her literary works, Mahashweta Devi emphasizes the oppressed's revolt and their exploitation as subalterns. She has transformed feminine storytelling into a defiant gesture via her works. The reader has a fresh perspective on marginalized women as a result of her literary depiction of women. Devi's literary works are mostly centered on the lives and struggles of women since she devotes a lot of attention to the women who live in marginalized areas. 1956 saw the publication of Devi's first novel, *Jhansir Rani* (Queen of Jhansi). They also studied the book, which tells the tale of the life and tribulations of the Jhansi queen. Devi purposefully chose to write her debut novel on a woman.

Nowshin, A. (2014) conducted research Women's roles in society are heavily influenced by perceptions of docility and carelessness, especially those of disadvantaged or peripheral women. Marginalized (1) 1. "Marginalized" is used instead of "poor," "tribal," or "peripheral." There are no "decent" or "proper" positions or identities for women in society; they are the tribe, the impoverished, the misfits, or the rebellious women. Their sorrows were long avoided, and they weren't even seen as "wrong," just the inevitable results of day-to-day existence. Every woman faces the same tragedy, albeit many of them have commonalities. No woman is a member of the upper class or escapes the destiny of suffering. They are in different circumstances, yet their experiences are identical. The tales of Mahashweta Devi reveal the terrible reality of women's suffering as well as their capacity for endurance and fight. Readers who read her books obtain the linear narrative that is abandoned in popular literature. Her works of fiction present a variety of female metaphorical situations and social positions, as well as their materialistic exploitation of the body for commercial and social gain. I'll go over a few of her short stories, including "Breast-Giver," "Draupadi," "Dhouli," "Shanichari," "Chinta," "Giribala," "Ma from Dusk to Dawn," and "Sindhubala," in my thesis to explain how women are portrayed paradoxically in society and how their voices are fragmented. I'll also assess their resistance and endurance.

Dey, S. (2016)observed the goal of giving the underrepresented voices in society a voice and a place is the foundation of much of Mahashweta Devi's works. Her job is to extract the quiet moments from the epic tales of history. This also applies to the trilogy After Kurukshetra, which creatively retells parts of the epic. By emphasizing the viewpoints of a disenfranchised group within society, she has attempted a revisionist interpretation of the Mahabharata in these works. Her short tales aim to challenge the patriarchal Brahminic discourse of the Mahabharata by presenting the epic from the viewpoint of women who are also underclass. Devi has given them not only room to exist in these tales, but also a higher standing. The goal of this article is to examine the tactics Devi has used to both voice the marginalized and dispossessed women, giving them a social advantage over their superiors based only on their marginalization.

Chaturvedi, P. (2024)The goal was to investigate the intricate issues of gender identification and feminism in the works of renowned Indian author and social activist Mahashweta Devi.

Mahashweta Devi creates a stunning tapestry in her works by fusing intricate tales, social critique, and in-depth analyses of gender dynamics. This study employs a close analysis of a few selected texts to highlight the many ways in which Devi challenges gender norms, examines power structures, and reimagines them. The study used a qualitative approach and provided insight into the author's literary tales' textual analysis. Her work offers a mirror through which to examine gender intersectionality and how it affects the poor. Devi's use of mythology, regional folklore, and tribal tales to create a unique feminist discourse that reflects the range of Indian women's experiences was also examined in this research. Studying the relationship between feminism and gender identity in Devi's works, the research emphasizes Devi's skillful portrayal of women negotiating complex social environments. Devi addresses caste, class, and patriarchy with characters like DopdiMejhen and Draupadi, among others.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF MAHASHWETA DEVI'S WRITINGS

Mahashweta Devi was a passionate social crusader who authored more than 120 novels and 20 anthologies of short tales. Her works and activism both highlight the experiences of the underprivileged, who have almost never been given a voice in popular history and literature. The past of Adivasis and lower caste people has been obliterated from mainstream cultural and historical literature. The study and writings of Mahashweta Devi reveal the unsettling reality of these oppressed communities, which continue to be at the bottom of the list of marginalized groups. Her significant works are Rudali, Mother of 1084, Breast Stories, AranyerAdhikar (Right to the Forest), and others.

Unlike other authors of her day or those who came before her, Devi doesn't attempt to hide the subaltern's subjugation in her literature. A little thought experiment would reveal that our textbooks do not include any Dalit literature. When I read Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's 1956 novel Abhagir Swarga in high school, I seem to have viewed it through the narrow prism of class rather than seeing that it is a portrayal of tyranny based on caste. In contrast to the ambiguous stance taken on caste discourse by novelists Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Sanjeeb Chandra Chattopadhyay, Mahashweta Devi's fiction clearly defines the Dalits and adivasis as political,

social, and psychological entities entangled in various forms of oppression. Her literature is distinguished by the narrativization that occurs within a historical narrative. She imagines history into fiction in her work.

Devi's depiction of women as gendered subjects in her literature compels discussion on gender in the context of caste and class inequality. She said, "I never consider myself a lady when I write. I focus on the class rather than the gender issue." Her comments may reflect her own Brahmin caste status, which separated her experiences as a lady from the actual lives of the people she wrote about. Devi used the concept of physical violence to highlight the intellectual foundations of caste patriarchy because she felt that women's bodies serve as a site of oppression.

The protagonist of *Rudali* (1997) is a lady named Sanichari who is a member of the Ganju caste in the Hindu Brahmanic hierarchy. Rudali are lower caste ladies who weep at their higher caste lords' funerals to support themselves. Here, Devi's depiction of the remains of the ladies from lower castes is not a macabre metaphor but rather a sign of the brutality against caste. Dalit women's body commodification reflects both the greater caste ethos of Indian culture and the caste feudalism that underlies it. Dalits selling off their sorrows gave rise to a new kind of prostitution under this Brahmanic social structure.

The mythological Drapaudi appears in the 1978 film "Draupadi" as Dopdi, a santal rebel with ties to the naxalite movement. Dopdi's three layers of marginalisation are highlighted by the juxtaposition of her identities as a tribal lady and a naxalite. After being taken prisoner, the army gangrapes her, mutilating her breasts and tearing her nipples. No god intervenes to preserve Dopdi's dignity, in contrast to Mahabharata when God stopped the Kauravas from raping Drapaudi. However, this use of phallic imagery does not allude to Dopdi's diminished dignity. Instead, her injured breasts become a weapon of resistance as she rips her fabric with her teeth, asking, "What's the need of clothes? I can be undressed by you, but how will you cover me up again? "Are you a man?" It's the horrific rape of two Adivasi women in Manipur a few months ago that reminds me so much of Dopdi's tale.

In *Birsa Munda* (1977), a tribal rebel in AranyerAdhikar, tribal resistance takes on a different shape. Her historicalization of Birsa Munda's actual existence in the late 19th century describes the tribe's fight back against British colonization of their highlands and woods. I think that Mahashweta Devi's ability to live the talk is what distinguishes her from other authors. Her written thoughts came from seeing the oppressed on the periphery. She spent thirty years traveling and recording the brutality and exploitation that subaltern people had to endure. She fought for their rights while living among them. We are able to uncover alternative histories by means of the narrativeization of her fiction. Devi said, "I've always made an effort to investigate other perspectives on history. I have attempted to portray the subaltern perspective in all of my publications."

4. REIMAGINING IDENTITY OF MAHASHWETA DEVI'S WORKS

"Reimagining Identity through Literature" suggests using a variety of media, including books, movies, and artwork, to examine the nature of recently emerging trends in interdisciplinary views on Identity, Culture, and History. And as said that Mahashweta Devi has authored over ninety-four literary works, including dramas, short tales, and novels. The most significant are as follows:

- The Queen of Jhansi (biography, originally published in Hindi Jhansir Rani in 1956; translated into English by Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta).
- "Mother of 1084," Hajar ChurashirMaa (1975); translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay, Seagull Books, 1997.
- Ipsita Chandra, Bitter Soil Tray, Seagull, 1998. Four narratives.
- The Occupation of the Forest (AranyerAdhikar, 1977).
- Agnigarbha (1978's Womb of Fire).
- ChotiMundaevam Tar (The Arrow of Choti Munda, 1980).
- Gayatri Spivak London translated the book Imaginary Maps.
- Dhowli (brief narrative).
- Dust on the Road (MaitrayeeGhatak, Seagull, Calcutta, translated into English).

- "Our Non-Veg Cow," translated from Bengali by Paramita Banerjee and published by Seagull Books in Calcutta in 1998.

Translation Services

- Three tales after Kurukshetra. Anjum Katyal, trans. Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2005).
- Seagull Books, 1998; The Armenian Champa Tree, trans. Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee, Calcutta.
- Danabala, trans. SunadiniBannerjee, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2005.
- Pretext: Four tales. Seagull Book, 2004. Trans. SumantaBannerjee, Calcutta.
- "The Fundamental Right or BhikhariDusad." Polygraph 4, Trans. Mahashweta Devi (1990).
- The Holy Banyan Tree and DewanaKhoimala. Pinky Bhattacharya, trans. Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2004.
- Romtha: Mahashweta Devi's Selected Works. Pinky Bhattacharya, trans. Kolkata: Seagull Books. • Seagull Books, Kolkata, 1997.
- "Salt." An Anthology of 1970s Bengali Short Stories: Protest. ParthaChatarjee, ed. Mitra Tapan Trans. Achintya Gupta, Calcutta, 1981.
- "Seeds." Mahashweta Devi, trans. Panorama: Contemporary Indian Short Story Anthology. S. Balu Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, eds. Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 20–43

Works Based on Film

- Sundhursh (1968), which portrayed a fictitious version of Vendetta within a thug gee cult in Varanasi, was based on her narrative.
- Rudaali (in 1998). Based on the short tale Daayen, MaatiMaay (2006).
- Chaurasi Ki MaaHazaar (1998).

5. AN ANALYSIS BY MAHASHWETA DEVI OF THE MARGINALIZED STATUS OF WOMEN

Mahashweta Devi is a name that often comes to mind when considering representations of underprivileged women in India. Mahashweta has done a fantastic job of portraying not only women but the whole downtrodden segment of Indian culture. Not only has she painted this often-overlooked area, but she has lived among them her whole life, supporting their cause with guanine. Our developmental paradigm has excluded a sizable portion of society. Many individuals who were innately impoverished and underdeveloped have not benefited from India's remarkable growth. Not only have they been excluded, but the crafty capitalists of growing India are also taking advantage of their bodies, land, soil, and minerals. India's development narrative has been drastically cut short. Mahashweta has dedicated her life to working for the underprivileged segments of society, including tribal people, laborers, and seasonal workers. Writing has been her instrument. "Literature for change" has been a Mahashweta mantra. She has tried to raise awareness via writing. She has tried to highlight the experiences of the underprivileged. By her works, she has attempted to alter society. The ancient adage "pen is mightier than the sword" perfectly captures the essence of her work. This essay will concentrate on Mahashweta Devi's portrayals of female characters.

Mahashweta's voluminous body of work features representations of several underprivileged women. The heroine of one of her tales, Draupadi, is a rebellious, fiery, impulsive tribal revolutionary. She is taken into jail and gang raped. This is a horrific tale of utter brutalization. In another narrative, another girl marries Orion. The father is an Australian who departs after sowing his seed in her mother's womb, and the mother is also a tribal, as is The Hunt. This girl kills her possible rapist and exploiter. To the outside world, she is a killer. She is seen by Mahashweta as a sad figure. At the age of 27, another Doulati woman passes away while attempting to pay back the debt that her father had taken out. It's ironic that her name, Doulati, means "full of money." The narrative of a woman torn between her imposed spirituality and her love for her kid is told in Ma, from dark to dawn. The narrative of Sindhubala is the tale of a childless woman struggling to survive emotionally in her harsh Indian environment. In Giribala,

a woman's daughters are bought out by their own father to be used as construction materials. Mahashweta has written on the extreme marginalization of the landless tribal people and untouchables in southeast Bihar.

The protagonist of Dhowli is a little child who, regrettably, is one of the untouchables. She is used by the Brahman landlord's young son, who eventually discards her. She is called a prostitute in public. Rudali also tells the heart-breaking tale of a professional funeral wailer. It's ironic that the professional mourner finds it difficult to express her grief. Meheshweta Devi has often included disadvantaged women in her portrayals. Her primary issue is not only how women are portrayed. She accepts life as a blank canvas in its entirety. Whether intentionally or inadvertently, Mahashweta bases the perception of her female characters on her own traits. For this reason, the fictitious realm of Mahashweta Devi has an infinite line of women who are defying all difficulties.

6. MAHASHWETA DEVI AN EMPOWERMENT-COMMITTED VOICE IN INDIA

A person may become empowered over time by doing certain acts that lead to that condition. Through their tears, we see the ordinary women of Thahad village and the prostitutes of Randi market developing into empowered women. Thus, "How are the Rudalis and Randis empowered?" should be the main topic of discussion. Awareness who we are is the first step toward empowerment, and in the story, the ladies of Thahad Village gain this awareness. This knowledge is aware of your strengths and weaknesses as well as the range of abilities that are buried inside you. At first, Sanichari is a lady who does not know who she is; she perceives herself as someone who is incapable of crying. However, after realizing that she can weep too, she has a life-changing talk with Dulan. The realization that she, too, was capable of crying marks the turning point in Sanichari's understanding of who she really is. Eventually, this makes her take advantage of every chance that presents itself and she starts to develop into a powerful person. "We have to make our own opportunities," as Dulan puts it.

As Sanichari changes into a clever and crafty person, her transformation becomes more apparent. What makes Sanichari an empowered woman is her ability to use opportunities wisely and her

wisdom. Sanichari's quick response to Ram avatar's uncle's passing prevents her from carrying out her forced labor. Sanichari has changed a lot, mostly because she now recognizes the hardships faced by others who are similar to her. As Dulan puts it, "Leave that kind of thing to the rich; don't weigh right and wrong so much." They are more knowledgeable about it. Hunger is something we comprehend. Another quality that Sanichari cultivates is the capacity to rise beyond the materialist demands of the outside world or the so-called "worldly desires." She thought that her biggest wants were "wooden combs and shellac bangles," but she is able to rise beyond these earthly aspirations once she encounters the demands of survival. The stomach's need take precedence over the senses. In a same vein, the prostitutes of the Randi market often saw them as worthless individuals whose standing in society would never improve. However, they too may advance in life with the possibility of a new "job." The Randis feel empowered too, because they understand that they are capable of rising beyond their restrictive circumstances.

7. CONCLUSION

The literary works of Mahashweta Devi are in sharp contrast to the idea that keeps coming up in studies. Her "field" experiences serve as an inspiration for her works, and her "texts" organically emerge as a representation of the encounter. These are delivered simply and with powerful metaphors that evoke strong feelings in the viewer and point out the ideal situation for the text's natural interaction with the surroundings. When an empowered individual start serving as a conduit for the empowerment of others, they are really empowered. Sanichari transfers the inheritance to others after realizing the potential of being a rudali. She creates a way ahead for others who are similar to her. She behaves more like Dulan, who supported her throughout her life, and she also aids others in progress. "But many deaths, deceptions, injustices had hardened her endurance and self-control," she says, instructing others on how to become as tough as she is. Thus, the narrative "Rudali," which centers on mourning, ends happily. Gradually, grief turns into a lamentation of joy. Thus, the narrative "Rudali," which centers on mourning, ends happily. Gradually, grief turns into a lamentation of joy. The research examined Mahashweta Devi's books and other works of universal literature.

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