Chapter: 5

Conclusion: Fictionalizing the Facts:

Establishing Mahasweta Devi As A Writer with Purpose

A responsive post-colonial writer, Mahasweta Devi deals with all the issues that create problems and difficulties in the life of subaltern. Mahasweta Devi is a writer with a purpose. She writes to fill the gap between marginals and the mainstream society. She constructs a bridge through which the mainstream society can contribute in the development of tribals and poor without destroying their culture and ethics. Her purpose is to tell that there are many communities that are still powerless and in the grip of poverty. Her purpose is actually to present reality through her various efforts. She presents those suppressed issues which are completely untouched and unnoticed by the mainstream society.

Her first published novel ‘Jhansir Rani’ is the autobiography of a woman who fought for her country. Her very first work, The Queen of Jhansi portrays the life of Rani Lakshmibai. It shows her role as a human being and as a Queen of Jhansi. She belonged to each and every common man. Through this work, she saw the effect of queen on the locals of Jhansi. Mahasweta Devi examined the effects of history on human beings. Rani Lakshmibai had deeply influenced Mahasweta Devi also. She re-writes the history of Jhansi as she finds Queen as an inspiration. In this novel, she depicts the
journey of Rani Lakshmibai from a simple girl of eight year old to a Queen who sacrificed her life for her land. Her struggle with the Britishers shows her undefeating spirit. Though she was a widow yet she took a step towards freedom. She did not shave her head as she believed in the right to act free. She is actually the symbol of patriotism and woman empowerment. Mahasweta Devi chooses plot for her stories, the life and the exploitation faced by the indigenous people in the hands of great kings. Then, the Britishers came and exploited them and now the corrupt government officials exploit them. She never creates the story but depicts the stories of real life people and heroes and their catastrophic records. Her work has focused on the three major aspects - historical, national and socio-cultural and has inter-connected them.

She discusses the issues which are left untouched by the government after enacting laws. The laws exist in the books but then execution is far from wanting. She raises the problem of caste-system, feudalism, corruption, bonded labour system and naxalite problem in India before and after independence. She repeatedly asserts that ‘laws are only for papers’. Her work shows a deep love and great concern for tribal and backward communities. She connects all the social issues and their effects on these indigenous people. She actually tries to fill the gap between marginals and the mainstream society through her writing. While reading her work one feels as if she identifies herself with the different characters and situation she has created. Her creations depict her love and affection.
for them as well as her realistic approach and courage to take stand for them against powerful communities. Her writing shows her realistic style of approach in themes and structures in her stories. She never tries to romanticize it. Her characters are also real. Her straight forwardness combined with realism enters into the mind of readers and creates great sensation. Her realism and manner of narration is unacceptable to the mainstream society. Her narrative shows the use of historical facts with social picture also. She projects that the major social problems are actually deep rooted in pre-independence history of India. She portrays the issues of casteism, bonded labour, bonded prostitution, poverty, corruption and connects them with post-modern India.

Mahasweta Devi imaginatively presents the cultural aspects of neglected people. She talks more and more about their culture and cultural values. She also feels that there is a mingling of nature and culture. Tribals believe that the forests are their mother because they get food, shelter and means of their livelihood. Tribals not only use the forests for their survival but also preserve, protect and respect the forest. Her description presents the deep love of tribals towards nature and concerns to preserve it for their upcoming generation. They spread awareness through their own ways of protecting forests and animals such as Bandurga Puja, Tree Wedding, Durgashtmi etc. So, she depicts the importance of their ethics in the life of modern man.
She presents the real and brutal picture of India. Her every work is related with the major problems of caste system, corruption, bonded labour system and naxalism. All these problems have their roots in the pre-colonial India continued in the colonial period of British Raj and continue in the post-independence India. The feudal system was started by the Britishers against the poor people. That system has actually strengthened the caste system and created a new world of bonded slavery. Mahasweta Devi is deeply concerned about the victims of such hazardous problems. Few people know that she is awarded Padamshree not for her writing but for her efforts for the people of small tribal groups of Purulia and Medinipur districts of West Bengal.

Mahasweta Devi actively participates in every aspect of their life. She is disturbed by their excessive exploitation. Earlier, they were exploited in the name of caste-system, made by God not by man as people believed. Now, they are exploited in the name of bonded labour system which is abolished in 1976 on the papers. As mentioned that the government has passed many laws and acts against this slavery system but acts and laws are never applied or followed by the mainstream people. The system has become a lifetime trap for the one who once borrow the money for food or sickness or marriage or any other ceremony. Devi’s Chotti Munda and His Arrow shows the signs of bonded slavery and tells that this system as made our “bloody glorious India.” Devi depicts the same harsh facts through her ‘Pterodactyle, Puran Sahay and Pirtha’ and
‘Doulati the Bountiful’ in her **Imaginary Maps**. Her realistic approach is constantly covered the other vibrating issue of naxalite problems and the security of woman through **Mother of 1084, Outcast: Four Stories**, ‘Doulati the Bountiful’, ‘Bayen’ and ‘Draupadi’ of **Breast Stories**. Through her female characters, she describes the pathetic situation of woman in the male society. Her woman is a mother, wife and daughter who lives, cares, and fights for her family. The story of Draupadi, Mary, Sanichari and Jasoda portrays the power and strength of woman in the male dominated society. Though they are oppressed and marginalised yet they are strong and have courage to defeat anyone. They portray feministic approach of woman for her own rights. Through Mary and Draupadi, Mahasweta Devi evokes a rebel against male dominance and exploitation of women in postcolonial India. She covers all the fields with realism. As a realist, she deals with historical, social, political, cultural life and values of the tribals.

Another important feature of her writing is the use of mythical names and stories to project the real life facts of the poor people. She re-creates the motherly figure Jasoda of ‘Standayini and the revolutionary spirit of ‘Draupadi’ in **Breast Stories**. By using mythical names, stories, legends, she re-creates the stories. Jasoda, in her story ‘Standayini’ plays the role of a mother not only for her own children but for other children also. Though her story is not similar to that of mythical Yashoda yet her name is enough to create that natural motherly feeling. Mahasweta Devi’s Jasoda dies due to
excessive suckling and looses her reputation as a mother. Her mythical name and her role of mother both can not save her from her loneliness, poverty and indifference of mean people. On the other hand, the character of Dopdi shows the power of woman. Draupadi of *Mahabharata* had five husbands but they are powerless and it is Lord Krishna who saves her from being publically stripped. Dopdi of Mahasweta Devi has lost her only husband and now nobody is there to save her. The men easily succeed in stripping her. Dopdi starts the revolt against male-dominated society which creates fear among them. Though, the mythical Draupadi shows her anger after that incident yet she never rejects the male dominance or company of her husbands. Here, Dopdi takes a strong and firm step to stop the male-dominance. Her action horrifies the men of the story. It shows that woman’s strong step against her own exploitation definitely defeats men’s superiority. The Delhi gang-rape case is a recent example. Damini or Nirbhaya fights back against her rapists. She talks about the double colonisation of woman but at the same time, she depicts the revolutionary spirit in woman. She shows the same fire, anger which Indian woman really needs and becomes an inspiration for all.

There are many stories which present the mythical connection where Devi depicts the local myths and linked them with her stories. Tribal communities believe that forest is their mother that provides food and shelter. For this, many myths about woods are
there such as Abhayachandi and Banachandi. Abhayachandi is the goddess who assures them to protect from all fears. The myth of Kalketu encourages them to hunt. The Acacia is a mythical tree of wish-fulfilment. Sometimes, their myths are associated with their ancestors just as in ‘Water’. Maghai Dome was a traditional water-diviner who respects and follows the order of his ancestors. All these myths and stories help them in their living but at the same time, these myths create havoc in the life of tribal people. Mahasweta’s story of ‘Bayen’ has proved it. The story tells the mythical story of Kalu Dome who asked all the cremation grounds of the world for his community. As Chandidasi was the descendent of Kalu Dome, her life has been destroyed by this myth. She has lost her husband, son and at the end, her own life.

Mahasweta Devi has projected both the positive and negative sides of mythological connection. It shows that she does not glorify tribals and their culture but prefers to portray only reality. On the one hand, myths help to protect forest and animals and teach a great lesson of life. On the other hand, such superstitious and mythological beliefs cause a great disaster. As generally seen in India, the practice of lemon and chilli totem protects people from evil eye and the serious practice of witch-burning is also easily found in the post-modern era. ‘Sati’ practice existed earlier but now it is declared illegal by the Sati Act of 1987.
Witch-hunting is a very common crime against woman in villages. Women are the victims who are accused, attacked and occasionally killed. In 2003, a case came to light where three women were branded as witches and suffered humiliation, eventually they all committed suicide in Kamalpura village in Muzaffarpur district in Bihar. As there are many laws to prevent and protect women such as Tonahi Pratadna Nivaran Act, 2005 in Chattisgarh, Women Bill 2012 in Rajasthan, Odisha Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill, 2013 in Odisha but the recent cases of women who are killed after the rape prove all the acts useless. In September 2013, a woman was killed and her daughter was raped as there were allegations against them of practising black magic in Jashpur district of Chattisgarh. All those recent incidents prove that laws are only for papers. Mahasweta Devi’s work clearly visualizes the dangerous impact of such beliefs which should be abolished not only by acts but by action also.

Mahasweta Devi re-examines the nationalist history and focuses on the ignorance of marginalised groups. She has rejuvenated the tribal history of struggle. She has re-created the history with legendary tribal heroes. Their history is not found in written form but she has made it a written record which helps the modern readers to understand their role in the freedom movement. Titu Mir, Chotti Munda, Birsa Munda, and Bashai Tudu many legendary freedom fighters fought for their rights. Through these rebels, she talks about many movements and historical events and
facts. In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, she talks about many tribal heroes such as Dhani, Birsa and Dhukia Munda. In just one story, she covers many real life heroes. She has merged many things together. She has presented story within story and issue within issue.

Another characteristic feature of her writing is the inter-mingling of characters and problems. The character of Shanichari in Devi’s *Outcast: Four Stories* as well as *Rudali*. In *Outcast: Four Stories*, Shanichari has become the victim of poverty and sexual exploitation and at the end, ignored by her own community. Another Shanichari is exploited by the religious system of the society, then by bonded labour system and reached in the grip of poverty and become ‘Rudali’ to save herself from hunger and poverty. Another personage is Joshmina found in the same story of Shanichari of *Outcast: Four Stories*. She is also trapped in the same exploitative system. The same book has another story of ‘The Fairytale of Rajabasha’ where the heroine Joshmina has also become the poor victim of poverty and sexual exploitation. Their stories of suppression are same. There is a slight difference in the beginning but their ends are same. They all are exploited, broken and shattered.

Mahasweta Devi portrays the inter-mingling of problems of post-colonial India. The post-colonial theory talks about language, representation, resistance, nationalism and gender. Mahasweta Devi
talks about the oral tradition of tribal which is rich and intense but unable to represent their folk on the global canvas. Mahasweta Devi expresses their patriotic feelings, sense of belonging to the land through Titu Mir, Chotti Munda and other tribal heroes but they are remained unnoticed. Mahasweta Devi discusses about the gender-discrimination. She explores that woman suffers the burden of double colonisation and is exploited by men. Mahasweta Devi raises and discusses all the issues which describe the concept of ‘nation’ in the post-colonial theory.

In every story, she has discussed more than one major issue. If she discusses poverty, she links it with bonded labour system or feudal system; if she raises her voice against women exploitation, she definitely talks of poverty, hypocrisy and caste-discrimination; if she is concerned to protect the culture of tribes or downtrodden people, she is equally worried to protect the environment. Her every story has many stories within, but shows only one truth that laws are only for papers. Her way of inter-mingling the issues shows that she wants her modern readers to understand the seriousness of such major problems.

She also talks about laws and acts made to protect or save the poor, the tribes and the women folk. In Titu Mir, Mahasweta talks about the Permanent Settlement Act, especially its impact on ordinary farmers. It was introduced by Lord Cornwallis which showed the desired effect on Britishers on Zamindars. Mahasweta’s
Titu Mir focuses on the influence of this act and because of that influence, shows growing awareness of the hero, Titu Mir. This act had given legal rights to zamindars to exploit. This was the beginning of bonded labour system. In her writing Outcast: Four Stories, there are few stories of the victims of bonded and contract labour system. She has made clear that this system of bonded slavery was formally abolished in November, 1975. She also mentions that the programme for the rehabilitation of freed bonded labours was launched by the state governments but it has not delivered much. At one place, she discusses acts and laws started by the government to provide them benefits. At the very same place, she presents the reality and facts of those laws. She writes that the uncultivable land is provided to the freed bonded labourers but good and fertile land is in the hands of the master, though the papers of ownership are in the name of freed labourers. It shows that policies or programmes to secure the lives of the poor have yielded nothing but are the money-making process for the government officials or agents. In Chotti Munda and His Arrow, she again depicts the “practicability of the Anti-Bond Slavery Act enacted through the Ordinance of the 24 October, 1975.” She also discusses Land Reforms Act Amendment in West Bengal that does not allow non-tribals to buy or keep tribal lands. But as it is seen, never applied on real ground.

Mahasweta Devi is a post-colonial writer advocating socialism. She describes about a nation which has historical
experiences of decolonisation. She talks about historical continuity and change, and economic exploitation of powerless poor people. She also tells about discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity. It provides them strength to unite. For this, Mahasweta Devi has founded Denotified and Nomadic Tribal Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG) in 1998 which especially works for indigenous people of India through outreach education, legal intervention and community activitism. It was formed to work for the constitutional guarantees for the protection of human rights of such communities. The DNT-RAG newsletter- **Budhan** is named for the denotified tribe. GN Devy has also contributed in this group and is also the founder of Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, Baroda and the Adivasi Akademi, Tejgadh, and the Budhan Theatre, Ahmedabad. The purpose of The Adivasi Akademi is to create a unique educational environment for the study of tribal. It also aims to provide the study of tribal history, folklore, cultural geography, social dynamics, and development. It was established in 1996 as a Public Trust for conservation and study of adivasi languages and culture. The akademi is working for the adivasi development, empowerment of marginalized communities and social transformation. The akademi also publishes a magazine named **Dhol**. It is entirely devoted to adivasis and written by them. It is printed in tribal dialects. Mahasweta Devi is also closely associated with the akademi.
There are some other NGOs working for the development of tribes such as ‘Samata’ in Andhra Pradesh. It works on the problems of land alienation, displacement and political disempowerment. FTS or ‘Friends of Tribal Society’ works for the upliftment of tribes and other oppressed communities of rural India. It also helps in providing education and health care. ‘Lodha Charitable Trust’, ‘Sujaya Foundation’, ‘Triratna Prerna Mandal’ and ‘Udaan Trust’ all are working for the development of underprivileged communities of India.

She takes initiative to find the hidden realities behind the beautifully constructed laws. For the dupe of bonded labour system, she went to Semra and found that the village has become the village of bonded labourers who are trying to re-establish themselves. In the name of help and laws, they got barren lands to cultivate after they were freed from the system, so again they had last option and had to choose bonded slavery. She has started Bortika for them. It is a quarterly in Bengali started in 1980 that contributes the tales of real life heroes and heroines. Sometimes, these tales of deprived people inspire others and lit fire among the readers. Devi has also donated prize money whatever and whenever she gets. She purchases their hand-made products to help them. Mahasweta Devi’s purpose of writing is to depict the tribal values of hardwork, self-reliance courage to preserve their culture and capability to survive in the hardest situations. Her ways to help
these gifted people are different and it is her work which connects their culture of preservation with the culture of exploitation.

Her writing covers all the perspectives of society with a command on her language. She uses various linguistic and stylistic ways that include irony, disturbing and de-tabooing words and parody. She uses symbolism to depict various things. ‘Arrow’ in Chotti Munda’s story is the symbol of continuity, strength and culture. ‘Forest’ is the symbol of mother and cultural values. ‘Breast’ is the symbol of motherhood, power and strength of woman. Sometimes, the titles are symbolic- ‘The Hunt’ is the symbol of their cultural festival as well as woman’s strength. Imaginary Maps is the symbol of hypocritic sphere of India where laws have changed the vision but it is all imaginary. The characters are also symbolic- Jasoda of Breast Stories and Sujata of Mother of 1084 are the symbols of motherhood and loss of identity. Mary Oraon of Imaginary Maps and Dopdi of Breast Stories are the symbols of woman empowerment. Chotti Munda and Titu Mir present the symbols of justice and revolt against injustice. The spirit of Mahasweta Devi is the symbol of her compassion through her writing and activism so that tribal communities can find an honourable place in the mainstream society of India. Her writing is characterised by the knowledge, awareness and concern for oppressed people. She uses them as weapons for her strength. Her style of writing and uses of different devices shows her concern for
her country. Out of concern, her emotions came out into her words in 1997, when she got Magsaysay award:

My India still lives behind a curtain of darkness, a curtain that separates the mainstream society from poor and the deprived. But then why my India alone? As the century comes to an end, it is important that we all make an attempt to tear the curtain of darkness, see the reality that lies beyond and see our own true faces in the process.
REFERENCES


3. www.boloji.com