CHAPTER VI

WOMEN AS VICTIMS

Women in our society are always looked down upon and are considered as inferior human beings. Since ages, they have been crushed by the male dominated society and are denied a status. In everyday news, we witness one or two cases of women, victimized to some sort of horror. Woman is experiencing a continuous trauma under male subjugation, though a lot of awareness is brought forth. Ram Ahuja comments:

Inspite of the legislative measures adopted infavour of women in our society after independence, the spread of education and women's gradual economic independence, countless women still continue to be victims of violence.

They are beaten, kidnapped, raped, burnt and murdered.¹

Woman is not as free and secured as man. She has been a victim to both psychological and physical affliction. She is considered frail and fragile. Since ancient times, man has acquired and occupied a superior status to a woman in the society. His status still continues unabated and his domination on woman has no end. Though many laws are amended to secure women, they become futile as man always has an upper hand in everything.

Mahaswetha Devi focuses different phases of suffering the women undergo in the society. She does not write as a feminist, but, as a human being who opens up the realities of human trauma. 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 under class is exploited, men, women together. Of course, women get worst part of it, but not always. Definitely, I am interested in women's positions, women's thought. But I am more interested in active work.²

Mahaswetha Devi like Mulk Raj Anand is more affected by class exploitation than gender exploitation. But, she agrees with Mulk Raj Anand that women are at a greater disadvantage among the exploited lower sections.

She explicates the problems of women and the misery, they undergo in a male dominated society and presents them in her works. The major problems, she deals are- the position of a woman in a patriarchal society, the position of widows, the agony of mothers when they are separated from their own kith and kin, and the sexual exploitation of women labourers by their masters and the harassment of women by the police in the name of interrogation. Mahaswetha Devi's works *Mother of 1084, Bayen, Breast Stories, Douloti The Bountiful, Statue* and *Outcast* depict the predicament of women under such imperious masculinity.

*Mother of 1084* projects both a woman's suffering under patriarchal set-up and her agony for separation and loss of her son. Sujatha, the protagonist suffers the misery in her family as her husband is dominant, self-caring and self-loving and does not care her feelings. There lies always a difference of opinion between them. The novel is totally based on Sujatha's search for her son who is
killed in an encounter. She loves her son more than anyone in her family as he is quite different from others in morality and character. She is agonised for his death. All the memories of past haunt her. She is relieved only when she knows that he has died for the welfare of the society. Her identification with him becomes total towards the end.

*Bayen* portrays the treachery of men and male-dominated society in subjugating and victimising an innocent woman, Chandi, for no fault of hers. Chandi's prosperity and well being creates an envy among the privileged. They think of harming her. They brand her a witch and abandon her from the village. Her husband also becomes one with them in expelling her. She suffers much in isolation. She is separated from her loving child. Her agony has no bounds. Through out the play, she longs to see her son and goes on singing lullaby for him, though, he is not present. The expressions and feelings of motherly love dominate the play.

*Breast Stories* is a collection of three stories, may be called 'Breast Trilogy.' All these three stories speak of the female organ, the 'Breast', each story dealing it in different aspect of treatment. In *Draupadi*, it represents as an object of torture and revenge, where hetero-sexuality and gender violence project on it. In *Breast-Giver*, it is an object of survival and is commodified. It represents an object of exploitation. In *Behind the Bodice*, it becomes an object to be played for sadistic pleasure under male violence. The three protagonists, Dopdi in *Draupadi*, Jashoda in *Breast-Giver* and Gangor in *Behind the Bodice*, undergo the trauma of both male violence and exploitation. They end with a tragic note.
Douloti The Bountiful unveils the monstrous exploitation of the poor by the rich. Douloti, the protagonist is exchanged for her father's bonded labour, in guise of marriage by a rich brahmin, Paramananda and is thrown into prostitution in his whore house as a bonded prostitute. She undergoes many times a rape and is tortured viciously. She is over loaded by many clients and is squeezed to the last drop of her blood. She develops venereal diseases and dies uncared for.

Statue speaks of conditions of a widow, Dulali. Dulali as a child becomes a widow. Since that time, she in denied the entry into functions and ceremonies. She feels very sad for her fate. She is treated as the misfortune of the family. She is not allowed to marry Dindayal whom she loves. By that, many mishaps occur and she is blamed to be the cause, as her presence itself is inauspicious. Her family abandons her and makes her an outcast.

Outcast is a collection of stories which exhibit the strife of women who bare the scars for no fault of theirs and are made outcasts. All the protagonists of these stories are sexually exploited and are thrown out of the society. In Dhouli, Dhouli is a poor widow girl who lives with her mother. In utter poverty, they beg Misras for their livelihood and work for them. The young Misra of the family falls behind Dhouli and deceives her in the name of love. She becomes pregnant. Misra leaves her in a ditch and goes away. She practices prostitution for her livelihood. Unable to bear the black mark on their family, Misras throw her out from their society, as her presence would cause them damage. In both Shanichari and The Fairy Tale of Rajabasha, the protagonists, Shanichari and Josmina are taken to far off places as contractor labourers. Shanichari works in brick kiln and undergoes seduction by the brick kiln owner and becomes
pregnant. For that, she is denied the entry to their village. Josmina works as a
contract labourer in the fields of Punjab and undergoes rape several times in the
hands many landlords. When she returns home, she carries a "diku's child, and is
made an outcast for that. Unable to bare the sorrow, she dies drowning herself.

**Chinta** is a sad story about a widow, Chinta. She is beguiled by Utsab, who
promises her of marriage. He takes her to Calcutta, begets three children and
ditches her without marrying her. She struggles hard to feed herself and her
children. During this time, her uncle and her son come to take her to their village.
In order not to get ostracized and get accepted by her society, she has to perform
some repentance rites by feeding all the villagers. For this, she sells her
daughters for eighteen rupees and leaves for her village with that money.

**Women under Patriarchy**

According to Catherine Thankamma:

Patriarchy is the system that traces familial descent and
economic inheritance down the male line. In a joint family
the senior most male is the head, the patriarch, while in the
nuclear families of today it is the father.³

In *Mother of 1084* and *Bayen*, we find various instances of woman
suppression under patriarchal system and male-dominated society. We find that
patriarchy is founded on the prejudice and male superiority, which guarantees
superior status to males and inferior status to females. Its values for males are
aggression, force and efficacy while in female passivity and docility. In *Mother

* diku:- a person outside the tribal community
of 1884, Dibyanath, Sujatha's husband is a dominant character. He is a complacent and insensitive man. He never cares for the feelings of his wife. He feels superior and likes always his wishes and wants to be implemented in his house. He is self-loving and self-caring and does not give importance to others' emotions. His superiority and efficacy has a lot of impact on his children. They are influenced and nurtured by their father's qualities. They also grow obstinate in their self-love. They lose morality in the way. All this, brings mental agony to Sujatha. As she is a sensitive wife and mother, she develops an aversion to her husband and children's attitude. Sujatha cannot influence her children and cannot change their way of living. Dibyanath's superiority in the house dominates her. Besides this, Dibyanath's mother who is alive, suppresses Sujatha and her individuality and always likes her son to dominate over her. She feels that everything must be done by his approval and consent and nothing should go without his notice.

Dibyanath and his mother constituted the centre of attraction in the home. Sujatha had a shadowy existence.

She was subservient, silent, faithful and without an existence of her own.4

Sujatha has had mere existence in the family, as ruled by the two autocratic people, Dibyanath and his mother. Sujatha does not even say a word in protest to all this oppression. Even, the job she takes up in a bank is not due to the generosity and freedom given to her by her husband. The family has supported and encouraged her because, Dibyanath, at that time has been facing some problems at his office and family had some financial problems. For this,
Sujatha's mother-in-law says, "You should have begun earlier. It was Dibu's generosity that he did not send you to work earlier." Though, Sujatha comes from an affluent and aristocratic family, is a graduate from Loreto College and gets a job in a bank on her own, she undergoes suppression and searches for freedom and identity. Because of the Indian institute of family and its ideology, she is bound to be submissive.

Dibyanath is a womaniser. He has an extra-marital relationship with a typist in his office. Sujatha, the victim of the male-dominated society and patriarchal system, has never questioned and never spoken ill of her husband because she is in a society which has suppressed woman and her feelings for ages. Along with this, she is also frustrated with her own kith and kin. Tuli, her youngest daughter who is much influenced by her father, always supports him in all his deeds. She does not mind his extra marital relationship. Instead, she feels proud of him. Dipankar, her elder son, follows his father's order and never has any individuality or ideas of his own. Neepa, her elder daughter carries a relationship with her husband's cousin. Sujatha always finds herself at odds with her household which has demoralised out and out. Sujatha is frustrated by all these and suffers mental torture. "That's why she tries to escape all the constraints by taking up a job in the bank rather than protesting." Her job itself is a form of protest and self assertion against the authority of her husband. Though, she resents the immoral acts of her husband and children, she, being a sensitive and responsible wife and mother, does not ignore her familial responsibilities. She is trapped in the conflict within herself between a sympathetic mother and a silent protester against the immoral life which her
household stands for. She suffers within herself, the torture the husband and family give her. Thus, she bears everything in pain and sorrow with all patience.

Unlike *Mother of 1084*, in *Bayen*, the set up is different. It has rural and poor background. Chandi, the protagonist, is a gravedigger by profession. She buries the dead children and guards their graves. She marries Malindar, an employee at Morgue. In *Bayen*, we are given an opportunity to see how in a rural society, the male domination suppresses and subjugates the life a woman. At the beginning of the play, Malindar has much love towards his wife and never forces her to implement his wishes. As time passes things change. When she begets a child, she gets aversion to her job. She grows reluctant as she finds an image of her suckling child in the dead children she buries. She feels disturbed. She tells her husband about this and pleads him to free her from the obligation. She asks him to take her and her son to a distant place where they can live peacefully. Malindar, is an insensitive man. He does not heed to what Chandi requests and pleads. He does not like her to leave her profession. He does not care her sensitive feelings at all. Instead of asking to leave her job, he asks her to continue it. Chandi gets frustrated by her husband’s attitude and his carelessness towards her emotions. She suffers and continues her job. Mahaswetha Devi, through Chandi seems to lash at men. She says, “Men in general are so insensitive.”

When Chandi tries to beseech him again, he shouts at her in anger:

> Now stop whining. I can’t stand it all the time. If you don’t feel like carrying on, why don’t you just throw it up?”

She is confused by her husband’s disposition, whether to continue her job or to leave it. She continues it as an obligation. Besides this, people suspect her
to have an evil eye and feel that she is the cause of their children’s death. It hurts her. Yet, she continues to work for the sake of the common good.

The cause for the rumours created on her is that the people grow envy of her, for she is beautiful, her husband has a government job, has a new hut and has two bighas of land for share cropping. All these privileges make her cynosure of the village and people become jealous of her. They think of harming her.

Gourdas, a hypocrite and counterpart of urban exploitative class, waits for an opportunity and plots against Chandi. One night, when Chandi hears the jackals cry, she leaves her suckling child and rushes to the graves to guard. While guarding graves, she remembers her child and her breasts ooze milk. During this time, finding it an opportunity, Gourdas sets Malindar and other men on her and brands her a 'Bayen. He says:

See for yourself Malindar, you bastard. It’s your wife, the Bayen, that’s been killing our children. Why don’t you ask her yourself?

Malindar asks her, why her sari is dripping milk, who is she suckling and for whom is her lullaby? When she tries to explain, no one listens to her. Malindar becomes one with them and supports them. He becomes a heartless human being and declares that his wife has turned into a Bayen. He says (Shouting at the top of his voice, crying heartrendingly at the same time):

* Bayen - means a 'witch'.
I . . . Malindar Gangaputta . . . strike my drum (beats the drum frantically) . . . to declare that my wife has turned into a Bayen, a Bayen!  

Being insensitive and rude towards his own wife whom he has loved and married, abandons her forever, trusting the men who have exploited the situation. Thus, she becomes a victim in the hands of patriarchy and male dominated society. Though, she cries out with agony, her words are ineffective. Here, we are reminded of Patricia Waugh's words: "If women speak outside the symbolic order they will either not be heard or be heard insane." In a male dominated society, woman is generally considered inferior to man. Thus, she becomes a victim of male dominated society and patriarchy.

In Titu Mir also, we find a few instances which show the position of a woman in patriarchy. Titu Mir's wife, Maimuna is a neglected wife. Titu Mir is always busy with his revolutionary activities and never thinks of his wife or her welfare. He leaves her with his parents and moves to different places without intimating her. She is given the least importance in his life. A wife who is said to be a better half, is not even looked at as a part of his life. He is like a picaro, moving from place to place, neglecting his wife and parents. Though his ambitions in the novel are to work for the welfare of society, he does not justify his marital life. After having spent three years in jail for his riot, the news of his arrival come to Rokeya, his mother. Then, we get notice of Maimuna.

As the day of Titu's return approached, Rokeya's eyes fell one day on her elder daughter-in-law. The sight brought tears to her eyes; she said, 'Your are my Titu's wife, Ma!'
What an evil woman I am for not noticing earlier: Your hair has tangles in it, and your lips are unstained by paan. Your face looks wan and lifeless.\textsuperscript{12}

That's how, Maimuna is neglected. She does not even have bangles to wear. Who would take care of her if not the husband. By Titu's negligence, she is almost lifeless. Though, she experiences the trauma, she never protests her husband. She endures everything with patience. When Titu is said to be leaving for Mecca to meet a Muslim leader, he points out that his wife has not said anything about his departure. She politely replies, "Have I ever said no to anything you've wanted to do? Have I ever stood in your way?\textsuperscript{13} She tries to explain him the grief and worry she experienced when he has gone far away from her. She says:

You went to Calcutta, and I thought, how far away that is.
You went to work for the Zamindar, and I thought, how far.
Then you went to jail, which I cannot even visualize. How I worried myself to death.\textsuperscript{14}

Though she expresses her sorrow for their separation for a long time, he does not listen to her with all care and interest. Instead, he diverts her attention by asking her about the bangles she wears. That is how, he does not take seriously about her feelings for him. Till the end of the novel, Titu Mir is very earnest about reaching his destination, and not at all thoughtful about Maimuna, his wife, with whom he has pledged to be with, through out his life. Maimuna, thus lives an isolated life through out the novel.
Agony of mothers

Both *Mother of 1084* and *Bayen* reveal the agony of mothers for their separation from their children. In *Mother of 1084*, Sujatha, the mother is agonised for her son, Brati’s sudden death in an encounter and is tormented much for his separation forever. The novel is totally a mother’s search for her son and a search to know him, what he stood for and the causes for his death are. The novel opens with Sujatha’s recapitulation of Brati’s birth and the struggle she has undergone during those days of her delivery. It reflects on the pains, a mother takes while carrying and delivering a child. It shows how and why the attachment and affection of a mother to her child is more than that of a father. It says that the innate feelings of a mother can never be measured as they are boundless.

In the beginning of the novel, Sujatha receives a phone call from the police, asking her to come to the police morgue and identify her son who is encountered. She is very much shocked by the news and is more shocked by her husband, Dibyanath’s attitude. Dibyanath, a self-loving man, does not want himself to be defamed as a father of a naxalite. Soon after he knows about Brati’s death, neither he goes to see his son’s corpse nor gives his car to his wife to go to the morgue. Instead, he rushes to hush up the news. This irritates Sujatha and brings an annoyance. She takes Tuli and goes to the morgue. She identifies Brati’s shirt, the fingers and the hair. She is terrified to have a look at his face. She knows that she can not control her sorrow. She gathers all her strength to pull the sheet away. She sees “Brati’s face, battered and smashed by the blunt edge of a sharp, heavy weapon.” She hears Tuli stifling a shriek. She could no
longer stand the pain. She turns round and blindly clasps Tuli to herself and sobs. Her sorrow deepens when she feels that Brati is no longer there for her.

From the day of his death, everything seems to be bitter for Sujatha. Dibyanath by his behaviour, is dead for Sujatha from that day onwards. Dibyanath tries to wipe out Brati from everyone’s mind in the family. He has given instructions to remove Brati’s picture on the corridor wall and has asked to remove every article of Brati that would remember him. This brings a lot of fury to Sujatha. She asks Bini where Brati’s picture and other things are kept. Bini gives her the keys of an unused room on the second floor. She is stunned by everyone’s behaviour in the house, in co-operating with Dibyanath’s ambition to wipe out Brati.

Sujatha’s love and attachment for Brati is more, compared to her other children. When Brati was three years, she is forced to take up a job as her family was in financial crisis. Then, she finds no time to caress Brati and he is almost neglected. She feels sad for not taking any care. She remembers three year old Brati clasping her around her knees, sobbing and nagging:

Ma, don’t go to office today, just this one day, why can’t you stay with me?16

Later, when he grows up, she develops a special attachment towards him. She finds him to be an exception among the members of the family. He is a man of ideals and principles. The way her household stands for immorality irritates her. She develops an aversion towards her husband and her other children who are corrupt and immoral. Crushed in this household set-up, Brati’s presence itself is a boon and a sign of relief to her tormented soul.
Sudden death of Brati, in an encounter, brings anxiety and depression in Sujatha. She loves him so much that she cannot bear his absence. She does not believe his death. She takes the keys of Brati’s room from Dibyanath and spends most of her time in that room. She lives with memories of her son. She embraces his clothes. She cleans his room and his articles everyday. The memories of Brati haunt her. Sujatha dreams of him to be sitting on the windowsill, reading poems and herself sitting on his bed and listening.

In her sleep Sujatha cried out for Brati and then she would come awake. The dreams seems so real, so irresistibly real, that Sujatha would wake with a start and start looking for Brati.  

She sits in Brati’s room and speaks to him though he is dead. She imagines him standing close to her. “She thought of all the mothers who had to call their sons in secret and feel their closeness in secret.” She lives in infatuation. She says to him:

You left on a dark night. Why don’t you come back in secret on a dark night again? Nobody will see you, For they look for you only in the stars.

His death is unbelievable for her. She feels him to be still alive. It is all the attachment and the bond between a mother and a son which is unbreakable. Here, Mahaswetha Devi achieves her art in portraying the invincible love of a mother and makes it the soul of the novel. She writes:

Sujatha tries to immerse herself in his life, as she read books with him, went to the zoo with him, or spent long
hours with his friends. Brati became for her the only legitimate excuse for going on living. May be, may be Sujatha had become too possessive about Brati.  

She gives him all her care and love. She nurtures him in a good atmosphere. Her broughtup has made him an ideal man. This disciplinary life in him has made her proud of him and made her to be always with him. His loss has given her heart an irreparable damage. She feels agonised for his loss.

Though Sujatha is so intimate with Brati, she does not know the reasons for his sudden death in an encounter. Later, after two years of his death, rightly on his birthday, she meets Somu's mother and Nandini, to know the causes for Brati's death. Here, we come across another grief sticken mother who lost her son in the same encounter. When Somu’s mother sees Sujatha, her eyes drench with tears. She sobs and says:

You have yet another son. You can still hold him to your breast and forget your grief . . . I lost my son, my son’s father, and I, with the tortoise life of mine, shall I live on forever, the two funeral pyres burning within !

Somu’s mother lies in a critical position. She loses both Somu and his father during the encounter in which Brati dies. She loses all hope of life, for having lost them. There is no one for her to lean on, in her life. Sujatha understands her agony and consoles her.

Later, she meets Nandini and knows about Brati from her. She understands that Brati and his friends bore the responsibility to solve the problems of the people by revolting against the odds of the society caused by
profit mad business men and leaders blinded by self interest. She finds a moral rationale for her son’s revolt and finds a fulfilment of life in his death. Now, she becomes one with him. She carries his revolutionary fervour and dies a martyr.

Unlike Sujatha, Chandi in Bayen suffers a different type trauma. After the people including her husband, Malindar blame her to be a witch and abandon her from the society, she suffers isolation and more, a separation from her loving child, Bhagirath, a small milk-suckling child. Earlier, she tells her husband about the people’s blame against her and pleads him to relieve her from the obligations of her profession and take her and her son to a distant place where they can be happy and peaceful. All her requests become futile and fate acts on her in such a way that she is trapped by the same suspicion and blame, and is separated from her child forever. She suffers a lot for her separation from her child. She always thinks of him. She is infatuated that he is still with her and goes on singing:

Come, sleep, come to my bed of rags,

My Child god sleeps in my lap,

The elephants and horses at the palace gates,

The dog Jhumra in the ash heap.²²

Through out the play, she imagines his presence and sings a lullaby for him.

Once when Chandi complains of her longings to Malindar, Bhagirath tries to see her. Then, Malindar warns him saying, “Drop your eyes, Bhagirath.” Hearing the word “Bhagirath,” Chandi feels eager to see him. She turns around in yearning disbelief and cries: “Bhagirath? My Bhagirath? Bhagirath?” Malindar scolds and warns her not to look at him or his son, so that, no evil befalls on them. Though, she is warned, her motherly love has no boundaries
fixed and cannot bind to the limitations the society has given her. She yearns to see her son. But, at the same time, she suffers within herself, a conflict between superstition and love. Superstition interrupts her to see her son. Yet, love dominates the superstition. Bhagirath also suffers the same as his mother.

After Bhagirath learns from his father about his mother, he innately urges to see Chandi. He says to himself: “I’ll not look on her face, I’ll just see her face in the water. There can be no harm if I don’t look on her face. I’ll look at the reflection in water.”23 He stays far from her and enquires about her welfare and tells her about him. As dominated by superstitious mind, she fears to see him as some misfortune may befall on him. She warns him:

Hasn’t Gangaputta told his son, there’s poison in the air into which I breathe, there’s poison in my touch? And the school going son, doesn’t he know it?”24

This fear in her indicates the love for her child. She asks him to go away and not to see her. But, as they are eager and longing to see each other, while leaving, Bhagirath raises his face and for one long second stares at her. Chandi also takes a look. After his departure, she weeps like a child for her son. She is deeply hurt for her separation from him and she cannot do anything. With her fear for the superstitions and out of her motherly love, she wishes that he should not come and see her again. She says: (she wipes her tears away)

The Gangaputta’s son should never again come to the tracks in the evening. I promise, I won’t cry again. Let him go home at once. Let him go home and swear that he’ll
never come here again even to look upon Bayen's shadow.\textsuperscript{25}

Chandi does not get a chance to live with her son and feels agonised for the separation forever. Finally, with no use of her life anymore to anybody, she sacrifices her life for the welfare of the people by killing herself to avert a train accident. The play ends with a sad note of her death, separated forever from her son.

**Women as Widows**

Mahaswetha Devi’s *Statue, Dhouli* and *Chinta* replicate the position of widows in our society. The problems, the harassment, beguility and humiliation, the widows face are projected in these works. The widows are treated as inauspicious and misfortune of the society and are even made outcasts. They are denied a normal life. They are tempted and beguiled by men and are victimised to the brim.

In *Statue*, Dulali is a widow. She is married at the age of four and becomes a widow at the age of six. She grows up in her father’s house. From the age of twelve itself, she is considered a misfortune and her presence inauspicious. Once, when she goes to the wedding of her friend Kusi, Kusi’s aunt turns her out, saying:

‘Out, Out!’ . . .

Duli! You’re not to see a wedding, dear, you’re not to join in the wife-rites.\textsuperscript{26}
Dulali is hurt by her words. She goes to her mother and with angry tears, she asks:

Why did you have my wedding, then? I wouldn’t be a widow if you’d done it later. I couldn’t see Kusi’s Wedding. ²⁷

Dulali, as a child itself, suffers abandonment from ceremonies. She is forbidden to enjoy and be happy like other children. Her ordeal in later life becomes more intensified. She falls in love with Dindayal, a brahmin priest’s son. Dindayal wills to go for a widow remarriage with her and expresses his will to his father, Thakur. Thakur becomes furious, calls Mahananda, Dulali’s father and warns him. With all failure and frustration, Dindayal leaves home, works against British and is hanged for looting the British train. Thakur thinks that all misfortune and ill fate has occurred due to Dulali’s casting her eyes on her son. So, he blames Mahananda and Dulali for the evil and throws their Manosha image in his shrine into the uncleansed house of Mahananda. Mahananda, taken by a belief that goddess Manosha would curse their family, trembles in fear. He strongly feels that all this havoc and wreck arose due to ill fated and inauspicious Dulali’s stay in their house. He feels:

Dulali is poison in the Thakur house, for Dinu’s death. In this family, Dulali is poison, for the divine rage, Brahmin’s rage. ²⁸

With these feelings, he throws her out of the house and family. He raises a room for her. He arranges rice, lentils, oil, salt and other things for her upkeep. Since then, she is made an outsider at home. She suffers isolation. After her
father’s death, her life becomes more complicated. Her brother does not even glance at her. She suffers hunger. She goes to the forest, takes some tubers, roots and some fruits and survives her life. Only after Nabin, her nephew, recognises her, she finds some solace. Like that, through out her life, in widowhood she grieves.

Both Dhouli and Chinta speak of the beguility of men who deceive the protagonist-widows in the name of love and marriage. Both the protagonists Dhouli and Chinta are from a poor background. The poverty and widowhood drive them into a typical condition of tyranny. Dhouli in Dhouli like Dulali, becomes a widow at an young age. Having come back to her mother and working in Misra family, falls into the clutches of Misrilal, who is attracted towards her body. In all her helpless state and also trusting that he would marry her, she becomes a prey for his libidinous activities. She carries his child. Misras come to know about these news which defame them. They sack Dhouli and her mother, who depend on their mercy for their livelihood, by denying them food. Both mother and daughter bear the pangs of hunger. Yet, she carries a hope that Misrilal would come and marry her. Meanwhile, she begets Misrilal’s child. Later, Misrilal gets married to some other rich girl and settles down at Dhanbad. Dhouli is taken aback for his deception and suffers humiliation. She, her mother and her child suffer in starvation. One day, she submits to prostitution unable to bear hunger. Dhouli’s act of prostitution raises a fury in Misras, as that gets them bad fame. So, they drive her out of the village summoning a meeting and announcing that prostitution defiles the village and she must shift herself to a city
or town to practice her prostitution. Thus, she is thrown out of the village, getting separated from her mother and child.

Though, it is a blunder committed by Misrilal, his acts are unquestioned and is not punished for his guilt. Instead, a poor innocent widow, under the hypocrisy and dominion of feudal Misras, is punished horribly for no fault of hers. A widow, here, is reduced to a sub-human level and thrown into affliction to face a more complicated life.

Similarly, in Chinta, Chinta suffers widowhood. Chinta is a widow with a son. When her husband dies, her in-laws try to occupy their property. They go on pesterling her, saying:

You’re an young widow.

Give us custody of your land.29

When she does not agree, they turn against her. She is insecured by this. Men begin to prowl around her house, knocking the door at nights.

During this, comes a handsome man from Calcutta, namely Utsab. He shows some pity on her and says that he loves her. He makes many promises for her. At first she does not encourage him. To soften her heart, he approaches her by showering his love on her son, Gopal. By this, she capitulates herself to his sexual urge. She says to the writer:

Youth is a terrible thing, Ma. The body’s hunger. I became a sinner.30

Utsab promises marriage, earrings, chain and bangles. They leave Gopal behind, with the relatives and go to Calcutta. There, he deceives her. Chinta says:
He ruined me and then left me. Didn't marry me, didn't give me any ornaments. He would beat me up, take all my money, and after giving me these two daughters, he absconded.\(^{31}\)

Utsab ditches her. With the two malnourished daughters, she struggles for her life. All the three lead an emaciated life. Chinta takes up a part time maid job, goes from house to house, does all the hard work and maintains their livelihood. Everyone exploits her and none offers atleast a helping hand. Seeing her plight, people tease her more. Whenever, she leaves late at night after day's work, a paanwala, tries to clasp her, tears her sari and laughs at her vulnerable position. She bears all this torture silently, in all her helpless state, just to survive.

During this time, two men come from her village with her son and shout at her: "You commit a sin and you don’t want to pay the penalty!"\(^{32}\) she is helpless. For the sin, she has committed, she has to spend two hundred rupees as penance, has to feast all the people of her village and has to forsake her two daughters. Then, she and her son would be accepted by her community or else they would be abandoned by their villagers. So, she prepares for their acceptance. She sells off her daughters for eighteen rupees. With her eyes full of tears, leaves them.

**Women under Physical Assault**

Most of Mahaswetha Devi’s works expose the bare realities about the women, especially poor and destitute women who are physically assaulted and raped by the privileged and mighty. The poor women for their existence and
livelihood have to depend on the privileged. Encashing their helpless state, they take the chance to exploit them for their physical pleasure. Many poor people in many villages in India rot in the hands of landlords and rich people. The poor people have no other go, than to submit themselves to such animal desires. Their dependency for everything makes them undergo such tortures and afflictions. They cannot either repulse or reject such tortures. They endure them and bear them with all patience as they cannot raise against the monopoly of the rich and high handed people.

The tribal women are used, abused and sexually exploited by the moneylenders and landlords. They are considered inferior and sub-human and are oppressed. "One type of oppression, that is, material oppression leads to and sustains another, sexual oppression." This is true in the case of tribal women. According to Spivak the women are "the super-dominated, the superexploited." Rape, torture, and forced prostitution are the means landowners employ to humiliate, punish and establish control over an entire community which is economically and materially dependent. *Douloti The Bountiful, Shanichari* and *The Fairytale of Rajabasha* are about the predicament and sorrow of the poor women who are forced and physically assaulted by their masters. All the protagonists of these three stories are employed as labourers and are contrived and compelled to satisfy the sexual thirst of the masters and their hoods. These stories are the bitter tortures experienced by the women. These innocent and ignorant women are beguiled easily by the clever and cunning masters and are turned into whores. They are physically looted and tortured every moment.
Douloti The Bountiful pictures the ordeal of Douloti, an innocent girl who is turned into a bonded prostitute. Paramananda, the master, a brahmin, disguising himself as a kind and benevolent man relieves Douloti's father from bonded labour and in return takes Douloti's hand, with a promise to marry her. As the innocent girl dreams of marriage, he throws her into his whore house. He makes her dress up neatly and gives her a sedative in her drink. When her body feels dulled, a huge middle aged man, Latia enters the room, closes the door and orders her:

Here, get up, take off your clothes.  

He pounces upon her and drags her roughly. He pulls off her sari, tears off her blouse and falls on her like a beast. Her helpless body cannot and does not allow her to resist his action. He rapes her and tears off her body. The author compares him to a pig. She says, "The 'grunt grunt' of rooting pig could be heard."  

By Latia's boundless sexual hunger, Douloti gets bloodied many times all through the night. As a rapist, he tears her, without even glancing once at the violated helpless body. Upto three years, everyday Douloti faces the same torture. Douloti calls him:

The Lust-struck animal that digs and tears her everyday.  

One day when Latia's interest for her is exhausted, she is thrown into the flesh trade. Baijnath, son of Paramananda takes up the reins and implements new policies. Everyday Douloti is over loaded by many clients. Her body rots by this over loading and she becomes wreck and torn out. She develops red swellings all over her body and is affected by venereal diseases. Having found her useless,
Baijnath throws her out. Doctors reject her. While trudging to her home, she collapses and dies a tragic death. Douloti’s story suggests “the complete identification of the exploited adivasi woman with India. She is all over India; she is India – meaning that the poor, exploited workers compose the majority of the people of India.”

Like Douloti, Jashoda in *Breast-Giver* is squeezed to the last and is left uncared. Here, the attack is on her breast that feed. Her milk giving breasts are commodified like Douloti’s body. Haldars family hires her to be the milk feeding mother for their children. She feeds Haldars’ children and retains the beauty of the Haldars’ wives.

By overfeeding, she develops breast cancer. Her breasts form wounds, bursting out, giving stinking and rotten smell. She suffers horrible pain. Everyone whom she has fed, neglects her. She is thrown out of the family, into the hospital and is left uncared for. She is isolated. She feels hurt and agonised for the betrayal of all—her husband, her own children and her milk-bred sons, who have deployed her for their growth and life. No one either sees her or attends her. Finally, after fighting hard with her life, she dies a most neglected tragic death in the hospital. Gayatri Chakravorthy spivak compares Jashoda with India. She says:

‘*Stanadayini*’ is a parable of India after decolonization.

Like the protagonist Jashoda, India is a mother-by-hire. All

*Stanadayini – A breast giver.*
classes of people, the post-war rich, the ideologies, the indigenous bureaucracy, the diasporics, the people who are sworn to protect the new state, abuse and exploit her. If nothing is done to sustain her, nothing given back to her, and if scientific help comes too late, she will die of a consuming cancer. 39

The people who exploit and consume everything of the donor (Jashoda or India), never reciprocate at the time of dire need, ditch her and kill her by their negligence.

Like Douloti, Shanichari in *Shanichari* and Josmina in *The Fairytale of Rajabhasha* are enticed and lured by their masters and are thrown into the dump of misery. Shanichari and Josmina are taken as contract labourers to far off places and are ill treated and sexually abused. They are agonised by their predicament both in their masters' hands and in their society, for having seduced by their masters and made outcasts in their society.

In *Shanichari*, during 'Adi Jati Raksha' movement, Shanichari, having no way to secure her life, gives up herself to contract labour. She and others girls of her age (16-18 years) are lured to have a good life at Kolkata and are taken to work in brick kilns. The owner of the brick kiln, Rahmat, gets attracted towards Shanichari. He grabs her hand, saying:

> Come, share some meat, curry and rice with me. You're just my type. Spunky girls like you are more fun. 40

Everyday he gets Shanichari dressed well and tears into her ruthlessly. She experiences a hell in his beastly rape. The other girls who have come with
Shanichari also experience the trauma in many ways. They are forced to sleep with the owner, the supervising staff, the truck drivers and local mastans. If they do not co-operate, they are locked up in a room, beaten and sheared with a hot iron rod. They are forced to drink heavily and are thrown into master's room for his pleasure. Mahaswetha Devi sites an example of a victim whom she has confronted:

A young Ho girl, aged 16, has been compelled to become an aurat of an aged kiln owner at Gajipur in 24 parganas, West Bengal. She is from the village Dharamsai under Chakradharpur police station.\(^{41}\)

Unfortunately, the poor girls fall into the hands of the masters and are seduced.

For every 'Holi, the malik, Rahmat’s friends arrive in hordes from Kolkatta. "They force liquor down the girls’ throats till they pass out. Pull off their clothes."\(^{42}\) and rape them. The girls bear all this as there is no way out for them.

About Shanichari, she carries Rahmat's child in her womb. When she is sent back home from the kiln, she is made an outcast from their society for carrying a 'diku’s child. She suffers loneliness and isolation.

Like Shanichari, Josmina with her husband is taken to Punjab to work in the fields of Niranjan. Niranjan entrusts work to Josmina and her husband at

\(^{1}\) Holi - A Festival in India.
\(^{2}\) diku :- a person outside the tribal community.
different places. He goes to the work place of Josmina, takes her to his hut and seduces her.

The Malik (Niranjan) came to the hut and stripped Josmina naked. Baby Masidas (Josmina's child) watched in fear as his mother was abused. ‘Arrey, this hut is here just for this ha ha ha. We have an efficient system. Come on, put on your clothes. Seen how virile I am? 43

For Niranjan, “She is just fresh meat; dark, junglee flesh which he has paid for.”44

Everyday, Josmina undergoes both psychological and physical torment by his acts. She feels stung by her critical position and for her husband’s tolerance. Unable to bear the affliction any more, leaving everything, they escape from there to Karnal Singh. Karnal Singh repeats the same vulture activities with Josmina. He takes Josmina away, every evening at nine to his bed. He would say:

Why shouldn’t I? Did Niranjan spare you, you wild junglee female? Don’t pretend to be virginal! 45

Unable to bear the torture, again, they run from there to Pritam. From Pritam to Sardar Gyan Singh. Gyan Singh is more monstrous than others. He locks Sarjom, Josmina’s husband, in a room, drags Josmina, pours liquor down her throat and tells his cohorts, "You can have her, one by one."

She suffers hell everywhere. They run from one place to another. From Gyan Singh to Sarban Singh. Sarban Singh’s son, Dileep Singh, grabs Josmina into Sugarcane field everyday and gets into the act. At last, Josmina and Sarjom
get relieved from all the turmoil, when Sarban Singh knows this, pays them full and sends them to their place.

Josmina carries Dileep Singh’s child in her womb. Her community does not accept her, her husband and her children for this and they would be ostracized. To avoid all this, Josmina kills herself by drowning in the river Koyena. Through out, the story Josmina continuously suffers for no fault of hers. It is for her innocence and submissiveness, she suffers. The maliks encash this, torture and kill her. The tale continues and there is no end to this problem. The sexual abuse of the labourers continues and the maliks’ dominance and crudity continues like a tale.

All the women victims Douloti, Shanichari, Josmina are from the poorest section of the society. Their ignorance and poverty makes them submissive. They accept any kind of suppression and subjugation for their survival. This state makes the feudal lords exploitative and immoral. They play with the bodies of women and never spare even to kill them, if they do not satisfy their animal desires. Many women like these protagonists in rural India, still suffer the trauma of sexual exploitation. Maliks like Paramananda, Latia, Baijnath, Rahmat, Niranjan, Karnal Singh, Pritam, Gyan Singh and Dileep Singh still continue their malevolent and imperious acts. There is no end to their manoeuvres. Many women labourers still rot in wretchedness. Mahaswetha Devi through these stories brings the real picture of tribulation of the poor women in rural India.

The police who have to protect and secure the women citizens of the nation, themselves, violate the norms of the society and act against them. Instead of protecting them, they harass, physically assault and sexually abuse them. They
make law favourable to themselves. In the name of interrogation, they physically
torture and even rape the women. Mahaswetha Devi’s *Mother of 1084*,
*Draupadi* and *Behind the Bodice* project such victimization of women and the
atrocities of police men. They expose monstrous and cruel nature of police.

In *Mother of 1084*, Sarojpal, the deputy commissioner of detective
department, arrests Nandini and interrogates her. In the interrogation, he
physically tortures her. He gets her hands and legs tied to a chair. He goes on
asking her different questions. When she keeps numb to his inquisition, he
becomes violent.

He lights a cigarette, presses the lighted cigarette to
Nandini’s cheek. She screams . . . he puffs at the
cigarette, and then presses it again to Nandini’s cheek.
Nandini screams. The questions and the pattern continues.46

He burns her cheeks and her chest. She cries with the pain. Sujatha asks
Nandini whether it is the beginning of the inquiry. Nandini bursts out
saying:

*I won’t be able to tell you all that happened after.* *(Pause)*

*The sores on the skin have healed, but I’ll be never normal
again.* *(Draws her fingers across her face and chest.)* 48

The police do not leave her with this, they focus the gleam of thousand
watt lamps on her eyes and make her lose her sight forever. She loses every thing
in her life. She lives a tragic life. Thus, interrogation declines her life.

In *Draupadi* the army searches for the protagonist, Dopdi, a tribal
naxalite. The army kills her husband and captures her. They interrogate her. She
never answers them as she has sworn, “I swear by my life. By my life Dulna (her husband), by my life. Nothing must be told.”\textsuperscript{48} Irritated by her attitude, the army chief, Senanayak, instructs the army men to “make her. Do the needful.” Then, starts a violent reprisal of the army. This reprisal is not corporal punishment, but a gender specific reprisal, namely a multiple rape. Dopdi is tied to the four posts of a cot and made naked. The army men start to tear her body. She gets her “breasts bitten raw,” her “nipples torn” and her “Vagina bleed”. Then, she is thrown into straw.

Here, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak draws a comparison between Draupadi in \textit{Mahabharatha}, who is an example of polyandry and Dopdi in Mahaswetha Devi’s \textit{Draupadi}. Within patriarchal and patronymic context, Draupadi in \textit{Mahabharatha} is exceptional. Her husbands are legitimately pluralized. There is no acknowledgment of paternity which can secure the name of the father for the child of such a mother. And in Mahaswetha Devi’s \textit{Draupadi} there is a question of “this singularity by placing Dopdi first in a comradely, activist, monogamous marriage and then in a situation of multiple rape.”\textsuperscript{49} This ‘singularity’ demonstrates the dominance and superiority of men.

After the rape, Dopdi remains naked and does not accept to wear the dress in resistance to their act. In \textit{Mahabharatha}, Draupadi is about to be lost by her husbands due to default in a game of dice. The enemy chief begins to pull her sari in the court. She prays to Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna saves her. As the king pulls her sari, there seems to be more of it. She could not be stripped, as her sari is infinite by Krishna’s miracle. But, in Mahaswetha Devi’s \textit{Draupadi}, the men easily succeed in stripping Dopdi’s clothes, but they could not clothe her again.
She remains publicly naked at her own insistence. In resistant rage, in nakedness, she walks towards Senanayak, pushes him with her mangled breasts and questions of the immorality. It is for the first time, Senanayak is terrified and his self breached. This “story insists that this is the place where male leadership stops.”

By locating Dopdi’s appropriation of subjecthood at a point immediately following her rape, Mahaswetha Devi weaves the story “with the force of truly liberatory text that erupts through an imperceptible fissure in the seemingly inviolable estate of patriarchy.”

Like Dopdi, Mahaswetha Devi brings out one more woman character, Mary Oraon in her story *The Hunt*, who resists the libidinous oppression of men. She takes up a different method in facing that oppression. Tehsildar Singh, a contractor, lusting after Mary’s body, incessantly falls behind her. He goes on pestering her. Though, she repulses many times, he does not leave her. In an extricable repercussion, she agrees to meet him. On the spring festival, *Jani Parab*, where women perform the hunt in the forest, she agrees to meet him. She instructs him to stay behind a rock in the forest. She goes there. She finds Tehsildar Singh fully drunk. She draws him near and then, her feelings burst in revenge for his filthy actions. Now she wants to “hunt the big beast! A man, Tehsildar.” She lifts her machete and with all temper, she strikes him many times in revenge. Her clothes become fully wet with his blood. She throws him in the ravine and buries him with the stones. Thus, she kills the lust-struck beast.

*Jani Parab: A Spring festival for tribal.*
Both the stories, *Draupadi* and *The Hunt* are the texts to feed into a large discourse of resistance that knows no resolutions or closures but only a persistent problematisation of gender.

*Behind the Bodice* portrays a danger, when a professional photographer, Upin syndicates his photographs of a tribal beauty, Gangor and her amazing breasts. His photographs are widely publicized. Because of the publicity of this beauty in the chronicles, the breasts get ruined by the result of the fame his pictures have brought them. He knows this fact only, when he runs for her, for he is attracted and obsessed with those breasts. He finds that the pictures have brought Gangor an identity and the labour contractors, police and others force her to sexual harassment. By this, she becomes an alcoholic and a whore. Her breasts have been scratched by fingers and nails; only gaping holes remain. When Upin comes in contact with Gangor, she takes off her blouse and throws at him, shouting in a voice ragged with anger, “Your are a bastard too sir . . . You took photoks (Photographs) of my chest . . . O.K. . . . I’ll show . . . Look, look, look, straw, chaff rags, look what’s there.” 52

He is astonished to find “No breasts, Two dry scars, wrinkled skin, quite flat.” 53 The narration says:

The two raging volcanic craters spew liquid lava at Upin --

*gang rape* . . . biting and tearing *gang rape* . . . *police*

. . . *a court case* . . . again a *gang rape* in the *lock up* .

. . now Jharoa to Seopura . . . Seopura to Jharoa . . .

the contractor catches clients.54
This statement depicts the story behind the damaged breasts and reveals how Gangor has been and is being tortured. It even unveils the cruelty of the police men, who rape her in the lock up and place wherever, forbidding the set rules.

Once when she presses the charges against the police, they do not leave her and force her to libidinous acts. When Upin asks the shopkeeper about Gangor, he tells him, "The police came here because of the girl, so many times . . . so many times . . . the girl does not understand the police are men too, they will craze if your tease them."55 The police torture, seduce her and force her into prostitution. She undergoes the worst predicament, getting her breasts torn and scratched.

The story reveals that, "there is non-issue behind the bodice, there is a rape of the people behind it."56

By the time Upin knows this, the breasts are destroyed and Gangor, the agent of resistant rage finds him guilty. Upin, being innocent, but judged by his victim, encounters his sentence by flinging himself before a train. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states:

Upin is not to be engaged in a celebration of the natural.

His realisation is that he had made a mistake in assuming that the part object (that chest) is no more than the object of photography as prosthesis for permanence, a species of silicone implant, as it were.57

Upin’s misinterpretation leads him and Gangor to difficulties and charges him to death for his sensitivity.
Draupadi, Mother of 1084 and Behind the Bodice denounce the attitude of the police and expose the crude psychology of the police officials and their sub-ordinates. Senanayak and Saroj Pal represent the true face of crudity and replica of the police functionaries. Their victimization of woman to any sort, speaks of the ethics the police department functions with. These works of Mahaswetha Devi evoke the hidden realities of the police mind and action and show that the victimization of women is to the extremes and ceaseless.

Mahaswetha Devi opens up the hidden problems of women, which have been afflicting them continuously and causing a great damage to their lives and womanhood. Since ancient times, a woman has been restricted to a kind of life and has been undergoing different ordeals of life. She has been curtailed of the freedom and has been suppressed. Man has taken an upper hand over her and her status is reduced. His dominance and bestiality are unquestioned. She has been and is undergoing both psychological and physical harassment in his hands. She has been a victim of patriarchy, widowhood, prostitution, sexual abuse and harassment. Mahaswetha Devi succeeds in bringing all these elements to focus and in enlightening the people. She protests the atrocities of men over women, who are deprived of freedom and a status. She deals with the quandaries of both the women in a rich urban society and a poor rural society. Her vision over these problems of women reveals the accuracy of their plight in the society and brings an awareness to the people about their sufferings.
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