CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Presentation of victims or tragic figures in ancient literature aroused a sense of pity and sympathy in people. And the victims are said to pass through a process of purgation and that created a catharsis in the people. The victims are doomed to such conditions with their own weaknesses, frailties, follies, fate and circumstances. But, in modern literature, realism modifies the trends and brings a new approach to victims and victimization. The victims and victimization are used to convey a social purpose. This literature with a purpose is wrought to bring a social change in the society. It mirrors the lives and problems of the people. It is the process of enlightening the public to know themselves and others and act to change their odd situations and circumstances.

Victimization may be of different kinds. Society abounds in various instances of victimization and tyranny. Tyranny of a few over many, of the rich over the poor and the mighty over the meek. This has been the unchanging condition of human life. As this demoralised and dehumanized terror and detestation continue, the victim consciousness is bound to end all such tyranny. Committed writers like Mahaswetha Devi shoulder the burden and cry out to transform the world of such monstrosity and coercion.

As a writer with a social cause, Mahaswetha Devi expresses and exposes the injustice, agony, pain and victimization the meek undergo in the hands of the
privileged and the mighty. She brings to light the areas of people's sufferings, which are unnoticed and ignored. She draws sympathy for the victims and wages a relentless war against the oppression. She raises sympathy in the people for the victims who suffer incessantly and awakens in them a consciousness of repulsion.

Albert Camus in his 1957 Nobel Prize speech claims that, "the sympathy of the artist lay with the victim." Mahaswetha Devi demonstrates the veracity of the statement and brings before us the victims who have undergone an undue suffering for no fault. She adopts the medium of literature not only to explore the anguished consciousness of the oppressed and exploited, but also to focus the indifference of the people in power and riches towards these sections.

Mahaswetha Devi's preoccupation with the motif of victimization in her works becomes the most appreciated task she has taken to document everything accurately to enlighten the people. Her splendid presentation of the suffering poor has won her a good recognition.

Writers like Daniel Defoe, Richardson, Henry Fielding, Ibsen, Brecht, Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya endeavour to depict reality and victim consciousness in their works. They deal with different classes of victims suffering under different kinds of victimization. The social realists, Ibsen and Brecht are with a different approach. They depict the predicament of a common man in the society and his quandaries with which he is entrapped. They make their literature a vehicle to mirror the ills of society.
Like Ibsen and Brecht, Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya project the social evils and fight against them. They are humanists and they show 'the fumes of man's inhumanity to man' in their works. Mahaswetha Devi, with the same spark, diagnoses the evils prevailing upon the poor and destitute and penetrates deep into their pathos and awakens us to the realities. Her works unfold the untold agonies of the poor.

In *Aajir, Chotti Munda and his Arrow*, and *Douloti The Bountiful* Mahaswetha Devi portrays the suffering of the bonded labourers. These works throw light on the exploitation of the poor by the feudal mechanism and show that the system of bonded labour is operated beyond law. They depict the tyranny and crudity of the landlords and the privileged, under which the slaves are crushed. The feudal lords' authority and monstrosity are unquestioned. The slaves undergo inhuman subjugation and torture. The slaves' pathetic position makes them repulse every moment against the treachery of the feudal system. These works also bring to light bonded prostitution and contract labour which consume the lives of poor girls.

*Titu Mir, Chotti Munda and his Arrow, Seeds, Water, Draupadi, and Mother of 1084* present revolutionaries as victims. Mahaswetha Devi focuses on the revolutionaries who fight against injustice and exploitation. The revolts they lead are born out of continuous grief and long suffering they have experienced in the hands of the oppressor. They revolt against corrupt and exploitative mechanism to liberate people from the clutches of exploitation and to bring social, economic and political changes in the society. In their relentless war, they are injured and they even lose their
lives. Mahaswetha Devi in these works covers several revolts - Sanyasi revolt, revolt against ex-orbitant taxation, revolt against Indigo plantation and Wahabi Movement during British regime, Peasants' revolt, revolt against feudal lords and Naxalite revolt in independent India. They all evoke the invincible revolutionary fervour of all revolutionaries who fight and die for a cause.

*Rudali, Dhouli, Breast-Giver* and *Aajir* unveil the dimensions of poverty and dwell on the consequences of it. All the protagonists in these works are the victims of poverty. They struggle for existence and suffer much to survive and exist. For their survival, they take up odd and bizarre professions like mourners of the dead, breast feeders and bonded workers. These works concentrate on the effects of poverty which reduce a human being to an inferior level. They reveal that it is not caste system that makes a man submissive, but poverty. They all explicate the agony of the poor and their straits of livelihood.

Mahaswetha Devi in *Bayen, The Witch, The Armenian Champa Tree, Aajir* and *Statue* delves deep into the superstitions of people and explores to show how superstitions act on a person and reduce him to a mere beast. She exposes the effects of these terrible age-old maladies that are inveterate in the rural folk and make them ignorant of facts. She discloses the tyranny of feudal mechanism and the deceit of fraudulent Tantriks in subjugating the innocent by encashing the gullibility of the people for their selfish motives. All these works speak of the effects of superstitions on the innocent people, afflicting horror and reducing them to sub-human, outcast and alien status.
Mother of 1084, Bayen, Douloti The Bountiful, Draupadi, Behind the Bodice and Outcast explore the Women's anguish in all depth and variety. They articulate with both physical and psychological torment experienced by women and study women as victims. They portray the agony of mothers for their separation from their children and speak of women's anguish for the sexual assault and harassment they experience. They emphasize on how a woman is treated and subjugated in the patriarchal and male-dominated society and how she is entangled and cornered by the ignorant norms and ideals of the society. They elucidate the cruelty of men who look down upon women as inferior human beings, curtailing them freedom and liberty, they ought to enjoy as men. They also expose the monstrosity of the police in harassing the women physically.

Mahaswetha Devi's presentation of victims and their endless suffering, is a selfless and unflinching urge and commitment in her to unfold the untold agonies and harsh realities of the poor and exploited in the contemporary society. She makes avowal of her sympathies for the exploited. Her compassion and her effort to modify the existing social conditions reveal her personality and idealism. Her treatment of the victims would bear out the intrinsic fascination she has for the suffering underdog. Her insight into their pathos and above all her complex awareness into the existing realities and experience in the things by her own vision reflect her social vision, concern and perception of the repressive authority of the poor. And it is her altruistic interest and sympathy for the suffering that makes her perceive deeply and write to transform their existing conditions. She projects what goes on in the mind of the
victim and shows the growth process by acknowledging its encounter with the world outside and inside.

There are many forces at work in furthering her identification with the common man, the destitute. Her father's training, influence and her life experiences with the destitute have contributed a lot of material to her writing. A few writers like Kavi Kankan Mukundaram Chakraborthy (the 16th century poet of Bengal) have inspired her to deal with the life of a common man. His work *Chandrika Panchali* still remains a source of inspiration. She writes:

Mukundaram awakened my interest in the common people who later became a part of my life. Now I write about the tribals from first-hand knowledge. The tribal world that remains unexplored is a loss to literature.²

Thus she writes about the everyday life and problems of the tribal folk.

Many writers like Tarasankar and Satinath Bhaduri have already dealt with tribal life, but, they differ a lot from Mahasweta Devi. Her outlook, her documentation of facts and realistic approach outdo everyone. Her accurate depiction of tribal suffering and feudal oppression bring a naturalist vision and due attention. And they become main aspects of her treatment. About these two important facets, Urmila Chakraborthy states:

On the one hand is her deep distrust of the privileged upper classes who are either directly taking in the oppressive dynamics
of Indian society, or living in ivory towers, preferring to ignore its ugly realities. On the other hand she expresses her heartfelt respect for the uneducated poor villagers with their solid goodness, unquivering fortitude and backs that refuse to be broken by centuries of oppression.³

She even says that her works are structured throughout on binary opposition: between the rich and the poor, the oppressor and oppressed, simple innocence and cultured opportunism. This statement indicates the main concern of her works and their growth. All the neglected and ignored matters by the mainstream Indian life become her strong points of exploration. Roger Sharrock, in *The figure in a Landscape*, says, "a poet is not a Camera, but a consciousness."⁴ This profound statement suits not only to poets, but also to other creative writers. The consciousness of a creative writer is moulded by a sort of value system, perception and imagination. Mahaswetha Devi has groomed her writings with the social consciousness to change the tribal world of agony to a world of happiness. Her purpose is to arouse social awareness in the minds of people and bring a change in the social and human values. She says that a creative writer, "should have a social conscience ... a duty towards society,"⁵ to understand and write about the people. Thus, all her creative writings hold a social conscience, which deals with a sense of sympathy for the suffering humanity.

Though her themes, characters and situations are a repetition, it must be admitted that she mobilizes and motivates the inner mind of the people by reminding
repeatedly to react to them. Even the ubiquity of oppression and the suffering of the individuals in the society continue as they are. Her demands for a changed social and economic structure is always appreciable and that is why, she stands to be one of the prominent social writers. About her repetition of themes, she says:

I am often asked how long am I to bore my readers with the same themes. My answer is as long as hunger, poverty, naked exploitation by the rich and the landed, oppression by the government machineries continue, I will continue to write the same things

All her works voice a protest against the existing system, exploitation and oppression of the poor in the society. Her works act as an effective instrument to voice her protest. This voice of protest is not new. Many classics from Russian, French, German, and English literature have voiced their loud protest against social inequalities and inequities. Many writers express their sense of dis-satisfaction with the pathetic conditions of contemporary society. For instance Dickens protests against vicious men and institutions in his *Bleak House*, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. Stein beck’s masterpiece, *Grapes of Wrath*, is a powerful indictment on the heartless treatment of poor in American society.

The Indian writers in English also follow the same trend to bring a social change. They endeavour to present the contemporary social problems like class exploitation, caste distinctions, economic, political and social injustices, and superstition and voice their protest against them. Lal Behari may be said to have
initiated the theme of protest in Indian English literature. His novel *Govind Samanta* is a protest against landlordism. Later, writers like Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya voiced their protest against the social evils and their contemporary problems.

Like Mulk Raj Anand, Mahaswetha Devi in all her works protests against the social evils faced by the downtrodden. She is committed to the amelioration of their pathetic conditions. All her works are powerful expressions of her burning conscience deeply touched by the grief of the suffering poor. She strongly feels that it is the social and moral responsibility of a writer to voice a protest against the injuries, deceits, insults and exploitations of the oppressors of the world. Her works trace out and zoom the unjust suffering of the victims, and victimization. Her aim is to wake up the people and free them from the weight of slumber. Her genuine concern and deep sense of commitment spring out to eradicate all the miseries of the people. Any reader of her works feels that she has an axe to grind and to mould the people to protest against the existing conditions of the poor. She believes that mere sympathizing with the poor does not rescue them.

Like Anand's social anger, tempered with the 'yoke of pity', the source of inspiration in all her works seems to be "an anger, luminous, burning, and passionate directed against a system that has failed to liberate the people from these horrible constraints." To release the human soul from all kinds of oppression and liberate the people from the horrible conditions, she makes her protagonists rebel against the existing system. She seems to suggest that the solution to the age-old oppression and
exploitation lies in the hands of the oppressed. She seems to say if the protests fail, they may have to be violent sometimes. She shows her protagonists taking to violence when they realise the futility of their protest against repressive system. Infact, she feels that violence is necessary to quicken the process of social transformation. About protagonists in her works, G.N. Devy observes that, "they face exploitation in the hands of the landlords, Government officials, policemen, money lenders. Almost invariably her protagonists turn violent towards the end of her stories. Theirs is the progressive kind of violence." To achieve their ends and for the better future of the mankind, she pushes the oppressed to rise, get organised and fight back. She portrays her protagonists in the same manner. A few of her protagonists even lose their lives during their revolt and that becomes inevitable to defend their inalienable rights to freedom and liberty. Samik Bandyopadhyay states that Mahaswetha Devi, "throws up leaders of men, moulded, groomed and matured by a whole Community, through and within its suffering," and makes them protest and revolt against the exploitative system, even when sacrifice is inevitable.

Taking the predicament of the poor into consideration, she presents all the social evils that prevail upon them, voices a protest against them and tries to give solutions to those problems. Considering her themes, her sympathetic understanding and fighting for the cause of suffering humanity, her works are most successful, recognised and appreciated.

Besides her writing, she is more a social activist, who stands a model to all. She goes herself to the doorsteps of the poor, stays with them, eats with them, knows
them and their problems and solves their problems. For this purpose, she has established an organisation in tribals to bring awareness and make them know themselves and their rights. She goes along with them to any government office, and to any feudal lord to solve their miseries. Her work *Dust on The Road* is a record of all these. It reveals her confrontation with the poor, the landlords, the exploiters and the government officials in various places. It records her vigorous work to know the poor, their problems and her solutions to their problems.

It can be stated that Mahaswetha Devi is not just a woman of words but actions. She is recognised by all and is given the most prestigious and honourable 'Padma Sree' award for her social work. Thus, she occupies a pride of place among all-social realists and social activists for motivating the people to fight against the social evils and ills of the day that eat away the vitals of Indian society.
REFERENCES


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