



NARRATIVE OF RESISTANCE IN *BAIT* BY MAHASWETA DEVI

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ABSTRACT

Resistance is generated from a certain circumstance of marginalization and exploitation. The theories like feminism, Marxism, Dalit studies, and post-colonialism are all discourses of resistance. The terms resistance and postcolonialism both have common features that help us to understand why resistance lies at the heart of the postcolonial studies. This research paper aims to analyze the voices of resistance in selected works of Mahasweta Devi by placing them in postcolonial context. The chief concern of this paper is to study resistance in terms of class, caste, post-coloniality, and gender.

Keywords- *resistance, exploitation, marginalization, body, power concern, gender, feminism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Resistance is a term that was introduced by Barbara Harlow in postcolonial studies. It demands recognition of all the people who are silenced and marginalized by hegemony. It is an act of opposing destructive and oppressing forces. Thus, resistance comes into being with its relation to an external force. Resistance is an integral part of postcolonialism in practice, theory, and literature that is practiced by contemporary authors. Resistance becomes a voice of dissent, a site that challenges the exploitation by dominant structures and a place that allows for transformation in fixed stereotypes. Resistance undermines the oppressive structures and exposes the unequal and unjust practices and eventually creates a space for the marginalized sections and people at the periphery. Traditionally, resistance was a negative connotation and was only linked with protest and destruction. But over time its positive facet has also come afloat. Because of its affiliation to the subaltern groups and people at the periphery, resistance also aims to foreground heterogeneity and diversity. [1]

Mahasweta Devi the known Bengali writer troubled by the disgusting means of humiliation that the lower classes, women, and tribals are subjected to. Hence, she embarks on the project to present the shocking realities of that takes place behind the curtains of sophisticated society. Most of her works have a rural setting but this work is located in the suburban and urban underworld forms a new and unique segment of her oeuvre.

2. DISCUSSION

The stories undertaken for study here show struggles against the exploitative power structures, and efforts of the people at the periphery to carve out their own identity. Usha Bande's in her book *Writing Resistance: A Comparative Study of The Selected Novels by Women Writers* defines resistance as: "Basically, resistance is the disequilibrium of power at the social, political and economic levels that provokes multiform resistances. Thus, one can say that domination and resistance are interlinked, and power is central to both. Resistance engages with oppressive power structures and questions the injustices perpetrated under those structures. It consequently reshapes the spaces available to the marginalized and thus helps to transform the existing order." A rebellious attitude is very clear in the works of Mahasweta Devi, especially when she deals with the issues of police, landlords, bureaucrats, and the caste system. The works of Mahasweta Devi uses the concept of resistance with the aim to bring transformation in society. The works undertaken for study in this paper exhibit resistance in two ways- Firstly, it is a strategy for protest and survival against various means of exploitation and secondly, it is the negation to follow the rules set by the mainstream society. [2]

Bait: Four Stories is a work by famous Indian author Mahasweta Devi. It is a collection of four stories that offer insight into contemporary Bengal society. It deals with the period when the Naxalite movement was expanding rapidly in Bengal and some other states. The government ran the society in nexus with the gang lords. Devi ascribes the growth underworld to the capitalists for the vested interests of the Indian business class. These underworld goons aimed at elimination of peasant and Naxalite movement as they pose a threat to the establishments with their plan to put an end to capitalist oppression.

The first story of this collection is "fisherman". In this story, the protagonist Jagat earns his livelihood by diving for bodies summoned by local police almost every day. These unnamed and unclaimed bodies belong to the innocent people who became a scapegoat for the authorities. It is really disturbing to see how the worth of the human body has been reduced to just seven rupees. This heart-breaking condition is described as "It was a common practice with police in those days to round up young boys in cities or villages, and surreptitiously kill them if they were suspected of any Naxalite connections and then dispose of them in some distant place to pass off their killings as cases of unaccounted murder."

The protagonist of the story gets involved in the criminal world. The story turns interesting and sensitive when his only son Abhay becomes a victim of this exploitative system and loses his life but Jagat reverses the situation in his favor. When he finds the corpse of his son in the tank along with the corrupt officer and he sees the handkerchief of his son around the neck of the corrupt police officer, he heaves a sigh of relief and becomes overwhelmed. As a means of protest, he ties Daroga's body to his bicycle with his son's handkerchief and undercuts the very system which functions by exploitation of the masses. This means of resistance gives an apt ending to the story.

The second story in this collection is "Knife" which was initially published as Chhuri in 1985. This work has been set in Anantpur, a village bordering Bangladesh where illegal activities take place in broad daylight and the society is dominated by underworld people. The abusive terminology used by underworld people has become more of a local language for these native people. Devi reveals minutely the underworld and politician nexus in West Bengal. This story shows the ways in which masses are socially excluded in illegal linkups between politicians and dons of the underworld. There is a reference to another village called Gauribari where citizens get frustrated with the inaction of the police and stand in revolt to drive the goons out of the area. The people of Anantapur also get motivated to do the same "Gauribari has shown us the way. Anantapur will not lag behind". Thus, this place becomes an example of resistance against the local gang lords who get patronage from the politicians.[3]

The world of Anantapur is ruled by many gang lords and their chief Germany. This group of associates is engaged in sinful activities like molestation of women and rape, extortion of money, murder of innocent people, and harassment of citizens. The leader of the group, Germany and his allies keep innocent people under control and threaten them with dire repercussions. The inaction of police and the cold attitude of politicians result in the constitution of a committee to organize a protest against the criminals. The people decide to take the law into their own hands and drive the underworld goons out of the town. The resistance of the people results in the killing of Germany. "The people of Anantapur celebrated the end of the Mastaan Raj but the police officer was unhappy as he couldn't do anything to save Germany." The above-quoted line shows the decadent condition of the so-called protectors of law and the rise of common people to power. This story focuses on the initial marginalization of the masses and then their subsequent steps of resistance against unjust and unlawful activities.

3. RESULTS

The next story taken under consideration is 'Body'. This story revolves around the brutal reality lives of prostitutes. In this story, Devi has shown how women's bodies are marginalized and exploited in the patriarchal setup. She is very critical of the misuse of a woman's feelings, emotions, and body. The process of commodification of women does not get limited to rural areas or lower strata of the society but deep analysis makes it clear that women are scrutinized, gazed upon, and exploited in almost all areas regardless of the boundaries of class, caste, and status. Simone de Beauvoir opines in *The Second Sex* that: "A prostitute is the scapegoat who faces the social anathema. At the same time, men unleash their turpitude upon her and discard her after every use." [4]

The extent to which these women are marginalized in society and are not allowed to have any individuality becomes clear when the protagonist of this story is mostly addressed as 'the girl'. Ketaki is a tribal girl who because of her circumstances dives into prostitution. "Her parents belonged to some tribal community. Both were arrested after several murders. Both, hanged. The little girl grew up as a ward of the state." From there she gets supplied to a high-profile politician by an operator, named M. Politician who is a so-called humanitarian uses her body to satisfy his lust. He first uses her to gratify his hunger and after losing interest in her he hands her over to his cohorts. She not only becomes a victim of sexual exploitation but also a victim of their evil plan. The poor girl fails to understand that the entire time she has been used by politicians and his allies as a secret agent and they plan all the illegal activities around her. Then she is left all alone to face the brutalities and punishment. Unable to handle any further torture and misuse the poor girl commits suicide. At first sight, it seems like she is only a victim who failed to take any revenge. Reading between the lines makes it clear that the very decision to destroy her body is an act of resistance. She does not take revenge by destroying them instead she takes it by destroying her own body. Her body is her only asset and it is her body that is an object of desire for them. This transgression signifies a protest against the society which tries to control the very existence of women.

The last story of this collection is 'Killer'. This story revolves around 26 years old middle-class youth, who has taken killing on contract as his profession. To make his ends meet and to meet the needs of his family he keeps on killing people unabated. In an incident, he gets hurt and loses the dominant position in the profession. His boss, Anupam Mitra hatches a plan to kill Sona to wipe out every proof of his links to the murder. The wickedness of his actions become visible in the following lines;

"Write: yesterday evening the police discovered the body of anti-social Akhil alias Sona in the abandoned warehouse of factory. The body bore marks of knife wounds. The youth...sir! Yes? I saw Sona today. Sitting in the shop, drinking tea. So what? It's afternoon now. The body is 'discovered' in the evening. Reported in tomorrow's papers. Where's the problem?" [5]

4. CONCLUSION

This shows the corrupt attitude of politicians who lack any kind of ethics or morals. For their vested interest, they do not mind killing their own people. It brings forth another harsh reality of the time, youngsters got engaged in criminal activities because of lack of unemployment and penury. This story collection makes visible the wrongs of the poor and the need to resistance by these common people. In this way, her very act of writing is an act for resistance that has only questioned the unjust behavior of upper-class society but has also played a vital role in the of subalterns. Article shows shifting frames of resistance in short stories to dispel the idea of a tolerant state. It makes visible varied forms of resistance and especially those raised by ordinary masses to challenge the dominant structures. Employing resistance, these people carve out their own identities on their own terms.[6]

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