

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL CRISIS OF A MOTHER IN THE NOVEL OF MOTHER OF 1084 BY MAHASWETA DEVI

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Abstract

Woman plays several roles in her life for the family and society as a daughter, wife, mother, daughter-in-law etc; she strives for the wellbeing of her parents, children, and husband ignoring her own happiness. Although she is considered as the least important being, she lives and obeys the norms imposed by the society. She is put under the stereotypical category of 'woman' by the society. Through the ages women had been subjugated. The novel 'Mother of 1084' by Mahasweta Devi is the best illustration of marginalized, neglected or suppressed woman. The psychological and emotional predicament of a mother, Sujata, fifty one years old living in Calcutta is portrayed in the novel 'Mother of 1084'.

It is the life of a bourgeois woman; Sujata awakens one morning with the excruciating news that her beloved son is lying dead in the police morgue. Sujata, mentally and physically gets shattered within herself between compassionate mother and silent protestor. Because of these choices she transformed from apolitical mother to the political one at the end of the story. In the novel Sujata is portrayed as the woman at the margin and her husband is considered to be the supreme authority in male dominated society. In Post-Colonial dialects 'the other' plays a prominent role. It refers to a group of people who are subordinated or rejected on the basis of class, gender, caste etc.

Keywords: psychological, predicament, suppressed, compassionate, dominated society.

The novel Mother of 1084 brought the novelist prestigious Jnanpith and Magsaysay Awards for literature. The novel deals with the Naxalite movement during seventies. The novelist Mahasweta Devi signifies that in this movement she saw perfect uprightness, selflessness and impudence to end the life for a cause. As a writer she was indomitable in carrying out her mission and documents it taking into account that she saw making of history.

The novel is measured an extensive land mark in her literary career, a watershed novel both in terms of approach and substance, and in terms of language and style.

Mahasweta Devi considers women as one group among the exploited class. Mothers bearing the brunt of social and political oppression endure all. However, in her writings she signifies her women characters offer resist with their indomitable spirit. They do not surrender passively as victims to the male hegemonies very often.

In this novel *Mother of 1084* written in 1974 Devi portrays the life of a bourgeois woman, Sujata, fifty one years old living in Calcutta. In one of her interviews, Devi says that the story is about the “awakening of an apolitical mother”. But after the death of her beloved son Sujata, mentally and physically gets shattered within herself between compassionate mother and silent protestor.

Mother of 1084 focuses on the psychological and emotional predicament of a mother who awakens one morning with the excruciating news that her beloved son is lying dead in the police morgue, and is embarrassed to a sheer numeral – corpse No. 1084. This paper spotlights how mother resists and tries to recognize the revolutionary commitment of her naxalite son; she embarks on to discriminate her own estrangement, as a woman and as a wife, from the contented, deceitful, bourgeois society her son had rebelled against.

Mahasweta points out:

“I set an a political mother’s quest to know her martyred Naxalite son, to know what he stood for; for she had not known true Brati ever, as long as he had been alive. (Devi, xii)

Mahasweta Devi here “concentrates on the reactions of a cross section of survivors, both those who bear the scars and wounds of those horrible days, and those who had lived through the days of violence in simulated insularity”(Devi xi).

In the novel, Mahasweta Devi actually deals with an immediate past event in order to remark on the current situation as a deterrent anecdote universalizing the experience of human being which drove many a mother and son to martyrdom. At one level the novel acts like a mere introduction of the inhuman suppression of the Naxalite upheaval in Bengal; however it is a tragedy of an ‘apolitical ‘mother who awakens one day to a greater fact and dies a martyr.

The novel enacts a single day in the life of the prime character. Sujata, the mother of corpse number 1084, hails from a prosperous upper class family, she is a sensitive wife and an adoring mother, and she is a stranger in her own family where she is condensed to a meager component. She is one of those victims whose kith and kin had been done away with in a confrontation with the people in power. Conversely to this, she feels at home in the company of her younger son, Brati Chatterjee, who, unlike her other children, is a man of ideals. Sujata fails to understand his life and activities that adjoins to the tragic interest of the novel.

After Brati’s death, his mother Sujata journeys into the past and undergoes a process of self-introspection. She wonders her family members, including herself or the society is accountable for Brati’s death. As she inquires the reason of her son’s death, she

discovers that the entire social system is ghastly as she takes a closer look at the society, she also finds no authenticity for his death.

Exactly two years after the death of her beloved son, Sujata gets to know the truth behind his sacrifice. Sujata discovers that Brati had revolted because he was not pleased with the way things were. He identifies that hypocrisy and corruption was rampant throughout society – in the administration, in the police, in the politics, in cultural-intellectual establishment and in fact, in every individual belonging to a particular class. He had lost faith in the social system itself which did not care for moral and human values, he wondered why only the corrupt and immoral people occupy the highest position in the society and people who care for morality and their country are killed.

As Sujata explores the causes of her son's death, she comprehends that the executioner in the society are those who adulterated groceries, drugs and baby food, had every right to live, the leaders who led the people to face the guns of the police and found themselves the safety shelter under police protection had every right to live but Brati and his friends, who wanted to reform the society had no right to live.

The more she learns of her son she gets closer to him, Brati, the younger son of Sujata, like other youth, disillusioned with the present social system – a system that harbors many evils which thrive on the gullibility of the innocent people, responds accordingly to the People's Movement sparked off with the peasant revolt in the rural West Bengal and spread to the metropolis when the urban intelligentsia, out of a sense of remorse, decides to take part in it “for their guilt in acquiescing in the perpetuation of a system of exploitation from which they had reaped benefits for generations” (Samik Bandyopadhyay viii).

She wonders whether her son or his killers are criminals and discovers that his son was the criminal because he had lost faith in this Indian society ruled by profit mad businessmen and leaders blinded by self-interest and protested against injustice.

Dibyanath Chatterjee, Sujata's husband, is an overbearing and complacent man. He does not hesitate to risk the private sentiments to keep his public stature untarnished. This attitude of his is vividly depicted in the novel, when they receive a phone call from the police to identify corpse number 1084 which is, in fact, Brati's, who has in the meantime been deprived of his identity as a person, and given another 'dehumanized identity' as corpse number 1084. Sujata was shocked when she found the indifference in the character of her husband who was searching out the ways to hush up the incidents with the fear of stigma in the society for his son's involvement in anti-government affair.

Sujata feels suffocated under the weight of the stifling values enjoined on her by the patriarchal institution. Yet she never ventures to disentangle herself from them. Though aware of her husband's womanizing and corrupt practices she does not protest. Many a times she resents the immoral acts of her children, but continues to discharge her familial duties, calmly bearing all kinds of humiliations. She is very fond of her youngest son,

Brati, who unlike her other children is a man of integrity. She appears to find in his company what she misses in her household.

Having felt alienated from her corrupt household, Sujata takes up a job in the bank in order to escape all the constraints. Her work is in itself a form of protest and self assertion against the patriarchal authority of her husband.

Although it is two long years since Brati was killed, her mind is filled with his memories. Not unusually, at times, Sujata tries to find a fulfillment in his death which she has never dared to claim for herself. It is indeed surprising that Sujata, with an innate resentment, like her favorite son, against all the shams that are inherent in the patriarchal institution, fails to take cognizance of the rising tide of revolt in Brati. Hence throughout the novel Sujata is represented as a failed wife, daughter in law and also she considers herself as a failed mother who remained as 'other' even for her own son who was closely attached to. "There must be thousands of mothers like her who fondled their sons' clothes in secret and touched their sons' portrays secretly". (Mother of 1084 21)

Thus, Sujata is caught in the conflict within herself between a sympathetic motherland a silent protester against the immoral life which her household stands for. This divergence assumes an altogether different form when her motherly love is contrasted with the indifference of the members of her family towards the news of Brati's death.

The relationship, established between Sujata and Somu's mother – both of them victims of the holocaust during the 1970s – is not unnatural and it possibly turns a major threat to the prevailing social system as the victims learn to make common cause by revolting against all kinds of oppression. Somu's mother asks Sujata not to come again to her house for "They tell her, why she comes to your house? Forbid her. It'll be dangerous otherwise". (17)

The son's death is a moment of self-discovery for the mother. She journeys into the past to look back into her personal life too – her daily humiliation as a woman and her silent, determined struggle for self-anatomy and freedom which ironically realizes that all her life she has had a shadowy existence and she has been very subservient, silent and faithful. Her husband Dibyanath and his mother constituted the centre of attraction in the home. Sujata held unquestioningly to all these values, was expecting a child, her mother-in-law would leave the house to go and live with her sister.

Dibyanath never accompanied her when it was time. He had not allowed Sujata the most common rights that a woman possessed. He wanted his wife to be under his feed and his mother aloft. He was a male chauvinist and thought that as an Indian wife, Sujata's primary duty was to love, respect and obey her husband and he was not required to do anything to win his wife, Sujata's primary duty was to love, respect and obey her husband and he was not required to do anything to win his wife's respect, love and loyalty. He used to say, "I am the Boss in this house. What I say goes – thousands of times." (43) His mother held the reins who never knew that one could honor one's mother without humiliating one's wife.

Sujata was aware that her husband flirts with women, but she did not possess sufficient courage to interrogate him. When her husband had financial problems, she was advised to take up a job and later on when his condition improved she was asked to give up her job. Even Brati said that “father used you like a doormat” (81) initially, she takes injustices lying down and does not have the courage to protest

The mother, Sujata becomes aware that death was the sentence reserved for every one of them, for all those who had rejected a society of spineless opportunist timeservers masquerading as artists, writers and intellectuals. The men who rejected the Parties of Establishment were killed in a ruthless manner and to kill these faithless men one did not need any special sanction from the court of law or the courts of justice.

Sujata thinks that the human society, given itself to the pleasures of the modern world, is devoid of human qualities. Hence, the noble sacrifice like that of Brati's is in vain. She asks :(Pointing to the audience, and the dancers) Corpses, stiffened corpses, all of you! (Pointing to herself) And I myself? Did Bratidie to let you carry on in your cadaverous existence, enjoying and indulging in all the images of the world ... forever, till infinity? Never. ... Let this No of mine ... set the past, the present, and the future atremble. Let it tear down the happiness of everyone cooped up in his own happy happiness. (31)

The novel is a snivel of all those mothers who hit their breasts to mourn the death of their sons who are not admitting just because they are others. At last Sujata moved from the reality to the world where she is not treated as ‘other’ it was her own death. Thus, the whole novel portrays the pain of a mother in the society and her silent sufferings. There is no one to cry for her or to share her emotions and thus with the pain of sufferings she is flying into the place where no one can anymore hurt her. As Simone de Beauvoir states; “One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman.” (The Second Sex 301)

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