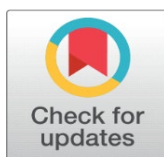
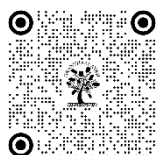


THE DOWNTRODDEN AND THE DOWNCAST: A STUDY OF MAHASWETA DEVI'S "OUTCAST"

Mary Vijayam Alias Jinju V. J.¹, Dr. Giftlin P J.²

¹ Research Scholar, Reg. No: 21113114012032, Department of English, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamil Nadu, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamil Nadu, India



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ABSTRACT

Mahasweta Devi was an eminent Social activist who fought for the justice of the marginalised and dispossessed tribal communities in India. Her writings mainly picturizes the sufferings of women, the politics of gender, class, cast of various grounds and social relationships. Females always experience back to back trauma under male subjugation. She doesn't pens out as a feminist but as a human being who portrays the realities behind every life. Throughout her life she expressed the plight of Indian women and raised her voices against the exploitation of women. Her works depicts the real brutality of Indian rural life. Mahasweta Devi's Literary works became a responsible factor for the origination of historical elements to come into limelight. Her works became a pathway to put forth the downtrodden life of outcast people. The present paper will focus on depicting the life of female characters who undergone various painful circumstances under male persecution. The four stories in the *Outcast* presents the suppressed life of women under patriarchal system in the class and caste bounded society. In these stories she exhibits the causes lying underneath socio- political circumstances and economic exploitation of four women from the backward class and the slave trade that binds them under the democratic spell of India.

Keywords: Dispossessed, Marginalised, Tribal Communities, Slave Trade, Bonded Slavery

1. INTRODUCTION

Mahasweta Devi, one of the leading women writers, through her works she portrays women as sufferers. Her stories convey the brutality and degradation of women under weak section for decades. She as a women writer explores the evil happenings in the socio-economic society. Through her writings she wished to bring out the atrocious happenings faced by the Low cast people. Innova Society women are always looked down upon and considered as inferior human being. Since long they have been crushed by the male dominated society. Ram Ahuja has rightly observed:

Inspite of the legislative measures adopted in favour 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, burned and murdered. (Ahuja 1997, 243)

Women became victims psychology and physically for long ages. Women suffers under different faces in the society. As a human being she writes on the sufferings and difficulties faced by the low caste people and those who are under

male suppression and their domination in the society. She evidently presents them in her works like *Mother of 1084*, *Breast Stories*, *Bitter Soil* etc. The life of victims such as Dhoulī, Shanichari, Josmina, Chinta are presented here through the chapters of Dhoulī, Shanichari, *The Fairytale of Rajabasha*, Chinta. Each of these female characters had undergone different ways of suppression, rape and slavery. Each female comes under different caste which were considered as low class. Here the cast itself determines the fate of the people. The writer has done a very brave act to present the downtrodden life of the outcast people. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes,

her writing and her activism reflect one another, they are precisely that - 'a folding back up one another - reflection in the root sense.... Indeed, if one reads carefully, one may be seen as the other's difference ("Translator's Preface", *Imaginary Maps* xxi)

The first character Dhoulī faced suppression from the outsiders and from her own community too. At the outside she is seen standing in front of Parasnath's tea stall - cum -grocery shop at Taharr around eight at night. She returns to her hut with a small oil lamp. She is in pain and don't know what to do. A machan on one side of the room, their bed. Her mother was lying on the bed and didn't speak to her daughter. Dhoulī checked the pitcher, drink some water and lay down beside her mother. Tears seeped from her eye. Tears of deep despair. Her mother could hear; she understood everything. Dhoulī kept crying..... (Devi 2015, 3)

Dhoulī age one such women who got crushed under the hands of upper class people. Misras the so called upper class person who is a Brahmin destroyed her. Though she had some faith in Misrilal but her mother was damn sure that he won't come back to take care of his daughter and she was also certain that he won't come to take care of her child after the birth. The higher class has not only enslaved them but also other women in the lower classes of Dusad Ganju Dhobi etc Dhoulī was in love with fair-skinned, curly hair, good looking, Misrilal who according to her he was a deota.

Dhoulī was a dusad's daughter, a widow, an unfortunate woman. kundan Misrilal's brother had an evil eye on Dhoulī. He was attracted towards her because of her tremendous eyes, her slender waist, her blooming breast(7). She did household works in Misrilal's such as sweeping the floor, keeping herself carefully covered with her coarse and took home only guavas and custard apples that were half eaten by the birds and lambs.

Devi's short stories tries to bring out the atrocities against the Delhi to women who were under the stripped of their honour and compassion and treated them as a mere community. The customs which were followed by the old tradition bothered the low class people. As she was a widow she was not allowed to look into a mirror or to wear a shell bangle nor a dot of sindoor on her forehead. In spite of being attractive she can't remarry and should remain as such till the last. She was not allowed to sing wedding songs. She was conscious that she as a dusad and Misrilal as a brahmin she never got a chance to ask him not to play games towards her. Once when she got a news that Misrilal was ill she was much disturbed. The father even asked Kundan to deny the food and restore their owner because he was more conscious of his respect and honour even the upper cast women encouraged their sons to indulge in those of activities. The men of our family have planted their seeds in so many Dusad and Ganju Girls. You're a hot-blooded young man. Even Jhalo has three sons by Kundan...It's always the fault of the woman for not considering a Brahmin's honour she's even more to blame.(13-14)

The whole responsibility lies on Dhoulī. It is always the woman who had to bear the brunt of the society. It became a regular practise for the upper class men to ruin the life of young girls in the lower cast. There were a lot of illegitimate children of Misras living in the quarters and were supported by the misras themselves and they were well treated by the villagers or otherwise they will be blamed by the whole society. Here the love between the young couple was intense and they wished to marry but Misrilal had much limitations by which he couldn't go beyond the wishes of his family and went helpless "Dhoulī my beloved, why you were born a dusadian?(15)

Dhoulī's mother who loved and considered her daughters reputation continuously asked her to abort the child but for Dhoulī the child was deota's and was unwilling to abort it. She thought that Misrilal will accept her but later on it went vain and he didn't return. Once misery left the place Dhoulī sits alone and thought about the past happenings along the promises she got from Misrilal long back. If it was a boy he would name it Murari.(18)

Dhoulī's mother was concerned in all directions they were not getting any job Douli's mother meets Maiya-Misrilal's mother and she gave some grains without touching, which was carefully done. Thereafter she indirectly says about the missing of brass pot which made Dhoulī's mother hurt. Hence her mother left the place and didn't go back for further any help and she even blames Dhoulī for that too. Douli approached Parasnath for a job and was denied of giving it. He offered maroa and asked her to leave.

Hereby Dhouli decided to draw her own fate. She decided to become a whore. Whoever is ready to pay can come. Moreover she was also abused by her brother-in-law. Misrilal who was married and went away came back by hearing the news. He warned her not to become an whore. But the questions raised by her numerous and wasn't answerable by him. Sanichari was the village gossip and medicine woman who spreads the news everywhere. She told Misrilal's mother about the resemblance of her own and her grandson. By hearing this Misrilal's mother got furious and asked her to leave the place.

The village never accepted any love relations which had happened between an upper class and a lower class women and if happened so they were not united at any cost. Once a Ganju girl loved his brother in law, the relationship was not accepted by the villagers and the panchayat drove them to suicide. They went into the deep forest and consumed the poisonous seed of kolke flower. In any way if the love gives birth to a baby of higher class, the baby will be taken care by the mother itself and the expenses will be given by the upperclass man himself.

Dhouli got 100 rupee note from Misrilal to leave the job and to go away. The amount given was not enough for food even. Sanichari visited then with some *makai* tied to her waistcloth. Dhouli met the dead end. She could hear pelling stones towards her house at night. She even screamed in return too. Even after giving birth to a baby she was still very attractive with her curves. The three soul under a roof couldn't fill themselves with what they got. She started inviting customers. She became ready at night and thus the visitors brought *makai*, salt, dal and a rupee. Their life got a new hope to live. She wore a new saree after a long. Prostitution changed her life.

The life of a whore started to spread. Because she is not under the control of anyone. she doesn't have to repay anything. She can earn herself and lead her life as far as she could and wish. Panchayat meeting was held by Misrilal, Kundan and Hanumanji within a few days. In the meeting people were not asked about their opinion. Hanumanji announced his own opinion in practise of Dhouli's whore life. She was not allowed to lead his/her life as a prostitute in the village:

Dhouli Cannot practise prostitution in this village she can go to some town, to Ranchi, and do her whoring there. If not, her house will be sent on fire and mother daughter child will be burned to death. Such sinful activities cannot continue in the heart of this village. This village still has Brahmins living in it. Pooja is still done in their homes every day. (32)

As per the orders Dhouli was forced to leave her own place. No one in the village can raise voice against the forced life style. All became helpless in this case. Kundan's contractor took her to a faraway place to Ranchi. she realised that her life changed, lost all the natural rights to live. The pain was very high to bear. Dhouli finally entered the market place like other girls she officially became a randi.

The second Shanichari, daughter of Moti Linda an Oraon girl from Dhurbaha village becomes a victim of labour in bricklin, a rejas undergone oppression. A middle aged Gohuman sold her to a bricklin owner in Barasat, West Bengal where she faced physical exploitation and got pregnant. However she managed to go back to her own village and happened to face ostracism. Hiralal, a harmonist in the train even warned her of the future cruelties. Gohuman Also gathered girls from the places of Ranchi, Singbhum, Palamu and gave a price to their parents. Once she takes the girl from a particular area thereafter she never returned to that place for a long time and will go to other places in search of new girls for this trade for doing so she was fairly paid.

Shanichari was only twelve when she started the journey and when she attained the age of sixteen. She was in the hands of crushers. She was leading a normal life in the bricklin in spite of having all the hardships faced. She earned thousands and the girl sells Shanichari sold grains and pulses for Mahajan. Meanwhile a fight happened between the military police and the people and Adi Jati Raksha Morcha Group came forward to fight for the Adivasi's. The movement swept through the countryside in that fight for Adivasi's many people got killed the Morcha called a big meeting in the village of Rata *haat*. Shanichari was about to marry Chand Tirkey that year unfortunately in that fight he lost his life and she voluntarily gave herself up to Gohuman's fangs. The bodies of people who got killed in that fight were thrown into the factory furnace and the press officially figured eleven. Officially figured 11 that was how the small place got attention through the headlines. The Bihar military police kills the tribals and in return the arrow started to stuck the BMP and thereby Ratha was now declared a protected area. The word Ratha means red but the BMP managed to turn the red Rata into *ranka*.

Devi got all these information through Janam Singh who has been writing to her regularly from Rata. The police and the BMP took over Rata and the adjoining areas and they never stopped to exploit them. The word *Janam* means 'thorn' in the Ho language this Janam Singh is a thorn for some people and for some others he is a *bah* - a flower

The BMP, CRPF and BSF are combining the entire area and have unleashed a region of terror. They are killing, torturing, plundering, destroying the crops in the field. It's inhuman. They've devoured all the poultry and goats. Smashed the ploughs. Destroyed whatever few possessions there were. Pots and pans, huts all raised to the ground. The homeless adivasis have been driven to shelter in the forest. They have no rice, no salt, no clothes. They were hiding in the hills and forest caves. Families are split up lost. No one knows where anyone is.(47)

A group of Ho- Oraon- Munda girls were taken by the BMP into the forest and raped them. Such scenes were so crucial and the phrase 'no clothes' should be noted that this much atrocities had happened to the people in India. In the House after house dark skinned grieving mothers sang:

My girl could live on tubers,
Wear leaves and buds in her ears,
Alas, trees can't grow clothes
And so my girl, said Ma-go
To the brick kilns I must go
To the brick kilns I must go. (49)

To run a brick klin the cost is very little and the profit is very high. Many Brick klinns had opened around Kolkata. The poor farmers give up their land, when they got threatened by those sardar through local muscle men. Instead they were offered money from them. The farmers voluntarily sells their land for a throw away price and become the coolies and labourers in the nearby brick klin else his crops will be destroyed. Because of the brick klin, great destruction had happened to the soil. Due to the searing temperature of the furnace the soil around the brick lane becomes barren for a few hundred years(50) Shanichari started her job at Rahmat's brick klin which will work from morning 9am to 3pm, nine months work and three months shut in the monsoon. The wages were very less. If they raise against they will loose their job and cant work anywhere too. Soon the owners will be supplied new coolies from other places. So rather than being jobless the poor people under the whole harsh treatment, they'll work for the owners.

If the girls tries to resist they will be locked and the huge muscle men will drag the girls away and thereafter their life will end up in prostitution, such happened earlier for the girls Joshima, Lugri, Jhini Parai and Phulmani. The worst they faced. Gohuman was also once a reja. Now she became the agent, Who keeps brokers to collect girls from the villages, instead of going by herself. Atlast Shanichari's fate was written. She got a child in her womb which won't be accepted by the producer nor in her village, as the child is from a diku, an outsider. Brick klin got closed all returned. Moti linda pleaded for paying a repentance feast according to their custom to live in the village and also this child can't marry a girl from their tribe he can only accept a girl who was born just like him. Chand Tirkey's brother was supportive for her to bring up a hut for them and he was the only character who can raise a question against these evil happenings. Shanichari continued to live her life along with her baby by collecting coal and sold it to buy oil and salt. This will continue as long as this system prevails.

The Fairytale of Rajabasha depicts the story of Josmina and her husband Sarjom Purti of Ho tribe in Kolhan, Singbhum district of Jharkhand. She had to face painful torments and hurdles. To repair the debt which was bought from Nandlal Sahu by Sarjom who had to work in his field. While everything was going in a good manner Nandhal's wife developed her wish to get a pacca house. To fulfil the wish Nandalal went to the officer Sardar Malkhan Singh and god ₹20,000, instead Nandalal will send people to him. Their life was happy:

Josmina collected roots and tubers from the forest. Living of just these and *ghato* made of *makai*, she looked gorgeous. A new mother, the curves of Josmina's body filled out like the gushing koyena in the months of rain. There was much happiness and peace in this first chapter of the fairy tale of Rajabasha.(59)

Nandalal went to Josmina to inform about the new job and also he threatens them about the debt and doubled it. In accordance Sarjom met Nandalal but was of no use. He returned to his family and they decided to leave their house for a new job and to repay the debt. Nandalal sold Josmina and Sarjom for ₹ 400 to Niranjana. The wages were different for male and female. Sarjom got rupees 80 and Josmina got rupees 40. They got a room from them to stay Josmina does household works washing, sweeping and then goes to the field, but entering into the field hut is dangerous. She carried her son on

her hip Niranjan's man Harchand told her to use the hut for having lunch and to keep her son sleep. The co-workers alerted her about the wickedness of malik. A few days later Malik came to hut and the evil man stripped Josmina naked and abused her in front of the baby Masidas. At night Sarjom drew Josmina close to him. Ran his fingers all over her body and said, I don't blame you. This is our fate!(31). Josinma got pregnant because of the continuous abuse by Niranjan and he used or considered her as a machine. After being abused she got back to work till eight at night. Niranjan got afraid and took her to town and aborted. That night itself they escaped from that place with the help of Sukhram. The next day they reached Karnal Singh's house and did the same work and he too abused her and they managed to escape after a month and thereafter they reached Pritam Singh of Kosa, at first he agreed to be a good person but later on he to abused her.

If a woman returns home pregnant with an outsider - a *diku* child - there is no forgiveness. The village society imposes *jatietka* on them. Even if they offer pooja, even if they hold a feast or *jatimardi*, they can't get jatirakab- get accepted. They have to build their huts at a distance from the rest, and after they die, they are buried elsewhere, not in the family burial ground(76-77)

After the next escape they reached Sardar Gyan Singh of Hosiarpur. After four months they escaped from that place with rupees four hundred because one day the drunkard tried to abuse her and poured liquor on her face, they managed to escape from the place and reached Sardar Sarban Singh of Badala village of Kapurthala District. The Sardara was a good man the three of them got food and room and he also warns them not to open door for anyone. Sardar's son Dilip Singh abused her, later on they complained it to Sardar and the good hearted man gave a month salary and asked them to leave. After two months the child's name Masidas was changed to Mata because they thought the name itself is not a good sign. They bought two goats and their normal life was going on

One day when Josmina went to bath, she vomited and realised of not having bleeding for the two months which means she is pregnant with Dileeps' child. According to their custom having a child of outsiders is not allowed and it is in full and shameful too. So she thought to end up her life and not bring shame for her husband.

Sarjom, Sarjom! In the fairytale of Rajabasha you are my salt tree and I am your flower. But a thunderstorm swept me away and threw me to the ground. The fairy tale of Rajabasha is the fairy tale of Kolhan too. The fairy tale of Kolhan is its very history. Oh waters of the Koyena flow on, flow on. Josinma will come to you to tell her tale. (82)

She went home cooked food and served, while Sarjom was sleeping she went to the Koyena river and ended her life. Sarjom took her body and said you are innocent. He doesn't want to blame her and doesn't want to make her as a culprit of all happenings which had happened to her. He want to keep her as innocent. The history of rape repeats one after the other even if the low class people try to escape from them to lead a better life. The evil eyes of upper class people or the dikus won't allow these poor people to live in better way.

The final character is Chinta. Every year a group of people migrate to Kolkata from Danton and Contai region of Medinipur. The people those who migrate from their places will find job and their livelihood as well in this area. The men who come from these places will find their life as cooks or plumbers in some of the middle class families. Sometime these people argue for their monthly allowance of soap washing powder pan and *Supari*. In the afternoon they will gather together along with the new comers their women will form a group and rent a house in the slums and they'll find their job as apartheid made from house to house or they even work as a maid.

Chinta was found among these women with a shot fair, wearing silver bangles and a tattooed necklace. When she was working she had a little girl with her tied round her waist with a rope the mistress in the house was very furious because of the child's misbehaviour she was much conscious about the cleanliness. The two year old ran after her mother. Chinta seemed to bring another child soon as the present one seems to be malnourished. The child who live under these circumstances will always face malnutrition, lack of proper food and medication. She used to wash huge piles of dishes and ground vast quantities of spices. Her damp clothes attract the sight of near by paanwalla. She had no one to leave the child while she is at work. Sometimes the paanwalla attacked her in the late night after his work in his full sense. When she became jobless she pawned her silver bangles for ten rupees and it was also heard that she lend her utensils for a little money. She also had fine bell metal bowls and glasses which were also lent for money and this was another kind of material exploitation which was done towards a helpless lower class women who came to another place for their livelihood. After her delivery she came back to work still unsteady and terribly weak and told that elder one was left with someone and the younger one with her. Writers words should be marked:

I had always prided myself on being a friend of underprivileged. Such feelings of self gratification were not always subconscious! Possibly I was impelled to do something to improve her situation. Perhaps this philanthropic rite was part of my middle class inheritance- a class which thought a great deal about being benevolent to others at no cost to themselves. Such values were indeed rooted in decadence. Therefore, my efforts at giving old, torn clothes, stale bread or an extra orange to Chinta, made not an iota of difference to her misfortune.(88)

In order to survive she managed to distil some essential food from the most possible circumstances to survive and she had put on some weight. She had recovered the tattooed necklace and also had seen her the other day in a new saree which was given by the mistress and her salary also raised it to 10 rupees.

One morning in the para a huge cry was heard and Chinta was the centre of all. It was a strange scene that a Chinta with a bent head, seems to be a culprit. Two men from her village came there. They were shouting at her by pointing towards a 12 year old boy. According to their custom if a person committed sin they had to pay fine so I said was asked to pay fine was not at all having any money she lent money from the writer and she told her story to the writer.

Chanda is a widow with a son Gopal. She has land, cow, two rooms, goats. Her relatives asked custody of her land. Utsab made many promises to get Chinta through Gopal. He promised her to marry and will also give jewels. Thus they came to Kolkata. She took her utensils with her, afraid that it would be stolen by others. He used her and left her and, didn't give any ornaments took whatever money left with her and gave two daughters. Now she should pay the penance of two hundred rupees, only then she can enter into her village. She can't take her daughters, Giri and Gouri to the village. Chinda gave her daughters to men it's better to tell that she sold them for ten and eight rupees each. She even remembered to tell goodbye to the writer, the men, son and Chinta went away.

The writer has realistically presented the atrocities suffered by all the female characters. Throughout the story the writer has tried to bring out the atrocities against the tribal women who were treated as mere commodity throughout. Females are also human with flesh and blood. Suppression towards them buds in different ways.

At the very first they were suppressed under caste differentiation. Then according to the law which being prevailed that the higher class people will suppress the lower class in the name of bonded slavery. Even though the slavery system was abolished the Dikus and Zameendars continued to keep them as slaves. Sometimes they were brought sometimes these slaves were bought by someone and will be transferred from one place to another and the agents will be getting prices instead these slaves will undergo heart treatments harsh words heavy work and physical torments. The sufferers always become sufferers. Their voice will not come out. They are forced to behind the walls. Those who questions will be left to death.

Females had always undergone great torments, mental pressure and had to face every kind of physical absurdities. Becoming a whore and a *reja*, became a daily happening among the low class people. Once they leave their village won't find a way back. It is clearly evident, though we got freedom from the shackles of slavery from the English, the socio-economic justice is still a dream for these kinds of low class people. The gap between the lower caste and the upper caste has changed. The slavery still exist in a varied form. The people of India still live as a slave in one way or the other.

The writer had skillfully developed and portrayed the tormented and destituted life of the lower caste females. Marginalisation of each class where efficiently and powerfully presented throughout the story. Chand Tirkey's and naigas dialogue clearly depicts:

"We should think about this as a community. There could be more Shanicharis in the future. Should we cast out our own women? Will that benefit our society?" The *naiga* said "We'll think about it if it happens again. Not now. This is a new problem"(54)

Through the life of Sarjom and Josmina, the tribal couple, it is clearly evident about the people who lives under the poverty line. The story also records the behaviour of the well to do people belongs to the mainstream and the cruelties which were done by them towards the low caste people. Even though day by day the traditional values are going downwards the tribals consider each of their festivals in a very great manner and they enjoy and celebrate the feast with a good meal. Even in the midst of suppression and poverty the couple are excited to live. Their wish to leave projects through their hard work and earnings.

Chinta, a widow who had to face the atrocities which was imposed by others. Her character employed a self revelation that there on livelihood should be searched by them they will be always surrounded by the exploiters she was also exploited under many circumstances her exploitation went materially and physically she faced material and physical exploitation. Being a widow her things and land were tried to capture by the other people, shows the material

exploitation. She was exploited in the name of a remarriage and jewellery which she believed and got abused. The trustless man left her after giving two daughters and She was also attacked by the paanwala, from which she managed to escape. In every aspect the female will be blamed for the happenings but the male category will be always in the supreme section they have the right to judge the females. As long as the female stay or live the evil eyes towards them will always watch and follow them.

The subjugation and segregation of lower caste people will always remain till the caste system prevails. India even after being independent from the classes and slavery of British, the domination of upper class people, their self proclaim as they are the superior among all the humans and the inferior will be tortured and enslaved within the walls put up by the higher caste people. They themselves proclaim as neat and they separate the lower caste as black skinned or dull skinned and they themselves get separate by which they are fair skinned and the fair skinned people won't accept or mingle with the low caste people. The separation of Class Division and the colour of skin still prevails and which makes the minds of future generation into a very different way. The life of each generation will also be narrowed because the pathway shone by the elders to them were all filled with ill treatments and illegitimacy. They filled their minds with caste system, separation, fairness etc.

Through the portrayal of characters and their lifestyle, Mahasweta Devi could courageously bring out the life of downtrodden people to the limelight. She is the one who can well-fully portray the life of the suppressed. There is no law which allows an upper class to suppress the lower but the humans within themselves creates boundaries and they become the rulers and enslaved poor people. Though the Indian Constitution give equal rights for all the human beings, the people within themselves has put up boundaries with their attitudes and social behaviors towards their classes and this custom hasn't changed even today, still prevails.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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